
THE GREAT BEAR

: BY LESTER COHEN :



THE GREAT BEAR

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To
EDEN GRAY

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CHAPTER I

THANE PARDWAY & CO.

ON LaSalle Street, across from the Grand Pacific Hotel, were the offices of Thane Pardway & Co. The rooms were somber, spacious, and for a place of business, ornate. Not a stick in that extravagant suite was anything but mahogany or walnut. The leather backs of the chairs and settees were hand-tooled after Sicilian designs. Four lavish paintings adorned the reception room, four lavish paintings as wide as the walls, four lavish paintings chosen for their panoramic breadth, four lavish paintings whose equals could only have been found in the most elegant bars.

Day after day, year after year, this Galaxy of sylvan nymphs looked down upon one Geoffrey Selfridge, an immaculate old man with time-honored whiskers and an austere, tremulous bass. Old Selfridge was a starched personage, a symbol of that freakish whimsy of Fate which transforms some men into the watch-dogs of the estates upon which they once paraded. For 'Sell a Million' Selfridge, as he was known in his hey-day, now guarded the reception-room gate to a number of offices that once were his.

Most prominent of these were two board-rooms. Each had a slate wall upon which quotations were constantly being chalked. One was devoted to the moment-by-moment flurries in the commodities bought, sold and quoted upon the Chicago Board of Trade. The other was given over to the active issues of the New York Stock Exchange. Each

had its customers' man ready to take orders, and a number of smoke-shrouded figures who gave them.

The adjoining offices were occupied by clerks and minor executives. There were three simply furnished nooks for the Pardway floor traders, 'Parson' Lerch, Silas Dore and Anton Pulski, who were rarely at their desks from nine to three—being, between those hours, in the midst of the scramble about the four arenas, or Pits, of the Board of Trade. The cubicles reserved for these legionaries led into three others, completely furnished, but never occupied—at testing to the fact that the enormous suite was larger than necessary.

The corridor from the reception room led by every office in the establishment, ending at a door upon which was lettered, PRIVATE. Beyond that door, in a room to himself, sat a suave young man named Wilkins. Besides absorbing his master's abuse and bombast, he took Mr. Pardway's dictation in longhand, touched it up and recopied it in a florid Spencerian before presenting it for signature.

The room which harbored young Wilkins was the one approach to a vast chamber, spoken of respectfully as Mr. Pardway's PRIVATE OFFICE. There it was that Thane went after declaring himself, "Too busy to be disturbed. Ain't in to Jesus Christ Himself."

It was assumed that when Mr. Pardway occupied his PRIVATE OFFICE, he was deeply involved with the plans of his campaigns. For once ensconced, the head of the firm rarely showed himself for hours—and when he came forth he would nod sagely, much as to say, "Mind's made up now."

But despite that impressive exit from his throne room, the broker did little or nothing when he closeted himself. For the most part, he sat in state, pompously unstimulating in a hand-carved chair tilted back against the paneled wall, feet up on what he described as "Two thousand dollars worth of doo-dabby desk." He would while away the hours by chewing cigars, gazing up at the ceiling and wondering

why the flies never fell down, or taking half-a-dozen pictures of scantily clothed females from a locked drawer, and smiling to them with a mock homage that suggested a sincere, but localized interest.

Altogether, the offices of Thane Pardway & Co. were the pretentious quarters of a man who was scornful of business—an attitude developed through long acquaintance with men of affairs. Every one of the extravagant appurtenances represented his contempt for the more soberly established brokerages. Moreover, they were intended to impress visitors with the wealth and complacency of the head of the firm. But other than their effect upon the envious or the admiring, neither the big suite nor its rich trappings brought Thane Pardway any sense of satisfaction. For he much preferred his home, the cool shadows of back-room saloons, or the quarters of his mistresses as places in which to roll up his sleeves, and plan, without putting pen to paper, an onslaught upon the wheat.

Because of the quiet of these rooms, an aspect they assumed the day their master stumbled over the phrase 'quiet dignity'—because of their quiet one might doubt that much business was transacted here. But the ledgers, over which Martin Heggins presided, flanked by a corps of six assistants, told another story. So did the hundreds and thousands of statements these clerks sent out, the white ones headed:

THANE PARDWAY & CO. have *BOUGHT* to your order
and the pink ones that invariably followed:

THANE PARDWAY & CO. have *SOLD* to your order

Then there were the bulging files of railroad notices, car condition certificates, buyers' orders for car dispositions, confirmation certificates, official weight certificates, bills of lading and statements from elevators—all offering

direct evidence of the fact that Thane Pardway & Co. was one of the largest brokerage houses in the Middle West.

Other than the good will—which is another way of saying that a great many men who tried to make money in the various markets professed a staunch admiration for the head of the house—the assets of Thane Pardway & Co. were memberships on the Chicago Board of Trade, the New York Stock Exchange, the New York Cotton Exchange, the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, the London Stock Exchange and the Paris Bourse. These were, in the order listed, the source of much, little or practically no income. But every one of them represented a sound investment, having been bought when it was to be had cheaply, having constantly appreciated, and making Thane Pardway & Co. a return in ever-increasing profits and prestige.

Those to whom Pardway delegated the care of his business made little use of any other connection than that with the Chicago Board of Trade. Through this membership they were privileged to carry out orders for the customers of Thane Pardway & Co., and deduct therefrom a profitable commission.

The head of the firm was not concerned with the functioning of his business. The ‘& Co.’ was merely a memorandum of those days in which Frank Lamson had been a partner. With him gone, Pardway regarded his brokerage as a safe, unthrilling, but entirely satisfactory means of making money without any effort. He might be in his office or not, might be active in the market or not—in either case he did not trouble himself with the “shebang”—except to be certain that it was being managed by the best men he could hire for a little more than they were worth.

The brokerage house of Thane Pardway & Co. was a money-making machine in more patient hands than those of the man who had fashioned it.

Standing, as he did, some six feet and two inches from the

ground, Thane Pardway had a way of looking down upon the world.

It was not so much a matter of his vast bulk. He would have looked down upon the world had he been knee-high to a grasshopper.

But as often happens in men who are possessed of a sublimely selfish imperturbability, there was a closely knit kinship between what was physical and what was philosophic in him.

He looked exactly like what he was—in every bit of pompous attitudinizing, in every heavy gesture, yea, in every pore—he looked exactly what he was. And yet, most people could not make up their minds about him. It did not seem quite possible that he could be what they thought.

For there was something substantially heroic about him, a sense of unconcernedly outliving and outlasting others—a sculpturesque cast of body and soul. He moved with a massive, almost immobile might—a sort of human steam-roller. And from under those redoubtable brows his small black eyes slyly obtruded upon life. And his large, impassive face, with the broad lips drawn up into a self-centered smile or smudged down into the stupor of a frown—was always large and impassive and unresponsive to what those curious eyes took in, as unresponsive as a mask.

His face, looming out of the large, round head—for all that it presented a high forehead, a broad nose, a stony chin, and wide lips in almost perpetual motion—was somehow unfinished, somehow still in the clay, somehow needing something it would never have. It was a face strangely alive and strangely dead—alive with some inner confusion, dead with some surface apathy.

People sometimes paused for a long while to look at it.

Thane Pardway as one of the anarchic figures of his time. There were the same materials of mastery in him that characterized the other gruff heroes who had helped make the United States the Money Mistress of the nations.

But in many ways he presented a turn of mind and a range of temperament that distinguished him from the prototype.

Of the hundreds of *Wein-stube* philosophers who knew Thane Pardway, those few who compared him with others of his ilk, those few who mulled over the manner in which he differed from the mass figure of his time, place and pursuits—those few came to feel that the very stuff of him contained some yeasty ferment that caused it to swell out beyond the confines of the matrix.

Thane, marvel-filled with himself as he was, often felt the fever of mastery flush through his being. And standing up to the Palmer House bar, and spreading his big hand out on the damp mahogany, he would declare in that swaggering rumble, "When they made me, see—they bust the mold!" His underlip would bulge contemptuously, belligerently. His eyes would close as if he trusted some sense other than sight to track down a dissenter. And his huge body would sway against the bar, a large boot rubbing over the rail, a great round head nodding in slumbrous self-assurance—the ship of a man with a precious cargo of might and pride slowly spreading sail before an alcoholic mist.

. . .

From what, or from whom he came, Thane Pardway did not know—or care. He had a faint memory of an unhappy childhood spent in a little stone house on the shores of Buzzards Bay. At eleven he ran away to sea. At eighteen he was a broom wielder in a Boston brokerage. At twenty-one he was a security salesman. At twenty-four, when other men were fighting over the Union and the Confederacy, he was smuggling Georgia cotton up to New England through the Underground Railway. Later, he was one of the adjutants of a small group of financiers who had precipitated the Gold Panic and its subsequent Black Friday—and had managed to share in the short-selling spoils. Two years passed in which he dabbled in wheat, stocks and real estate. Then came the catastrophe,

which for him, was a great stroke of good fortune—the Chicago Fire. Thereafter he settled permanently on the ash-heap that was to be a world metropolis, and devoted himself to trading in grain. In 1875, when he was thirty-seven, he bought a seat upon the Chicago Board of Trade. In the next few years he had become one of the most powerful of those plunderers who stalk their prey in the Wheat Pit.

But that wasn't all there was to him, he had told himself more than once. True enough, he had sold short on a world of wheat. And had his way with a raft of women. And washed down barrels of wine. And split open many a night with his song.

And still there was more, came the prompting of some primitive, egoistic instinct. In a vague, poetic, vainglorious way, the well of his being filled up with the sense of having seen prairie shanties spread themselves out, and rear themselves up into cities—sky-scraping cities with steely souls sobbing out of machines like gods. And they were all a part of the materialization of his days and his dreams—dreams in which he saw himself as some mighty overlord of the stone and steel that sought the sky—a mighty overlord through his prescience, power and daring in the Wheat Pit of the Chicago Board of Trade.

CHAPTER II

A SACRED TRUST

IN January, 1885, on that gray day Thane Pardway had turned forty-seven, he was slowly pacing up and down his lavishly appointed Private Office. He was wondering, in that unconcerned manner of a man who has nothing else to do, if those new roads to the West would show profits. And if they wouldn't, did they have enough surplus to pay dividends? And if they didn't, and the dividends were passed—then what? Like as not, the small investors would get panicky. Probably wind up like that Jay Cooke-Northern Pacific mess. And if it did—what would happen in the wheat?

The man who was ruminating over these possibilities, and over all the trunk lines of associated interests which enmesh the financial world, sat down at his marquetry desk, and rubbed his fingers over its ivory inlays. Then he glanced at the picture of a woman that graced the wall, frowned at it, and murmured, "Hippy." It was a self-conscious moment. He could not help thinking that Rosa Duveyne, his mistress of the past months, would have raised hell if she had been within earshot.

And picking up a pencil, he began idly sketching the letters of his name, wondering the while if the profits of the last year would total ninety-five thousand dollars.

There was a rap on the door.

"Come in."

Wilkins entered. "May I disturb you, sir?"

"I don't know. Seems to me, you're lockin' the barn after the horse has run away." Pardway's eyes rested upon the alabaster kerosene lamp which graced his desk. "Didn't I say I wasn't in no matter who turned up?"

"No, sir." Wilkins hesitated a moment, and then in support of his intrusion, ventured, "It's a lady."

"That so?" Thane's voice swelled out on a wave of interest. "Why didn't you say so? Show her in." He picked up *Brentano's Aquatic Monthly and Sporting Gazette*, and pretended to be engrossed.

"Mr. Pardway, Miss," Wilkins announced a minute later, in accordance with the prescribed formula.

Thane rose, and dismissed his clerk with the hint of an eyebrow. "You want to see me, mam?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer in a slight, winsome voice.

He tossed the magazine into a basket, and indicated a chair. "Have a seat." This was a funny one, he was saying to himself. Young, pretty as a picture, and in mourning. Not one of those women gamblers whose accounts weren't worth having. Nor the wife of an amateur come to beg off on her man's losses. Nope, something else.

"Mr. Pardway, I have an introduction to you."

He took the envelope she held forth, slit it, slowly spread the letter out, and read:

Dear Mr. Pardway,

Though you have not heard of me for a long time, I have done much thinking about you. I write this after nearly three years upon what my doctor assures me is my death-bed.

Thane turned to the last page, glanced at the signature, emitted a "Gee, too bad," and read on.

Of course, all this while I have been carried along by the money you so kindly advanced me. Every week, without fail, that check from you arrived the first thing Monday morning.

Be darned, Thane said to himself. Turned the matter over to Heggins years ago—then clean forgot.

At last, Mr. Pardway, I will be able to repay you. My insurance is in good order. It is made out to my daughter, Agnes. I am leaving instructions for her as to the exact amount to be returned to you out of the money she will receive when I have passed away.

As you may know from the many years I spent in your employ, I have always lived a clean, exemplary life. And so I go to meet my Maker with but one disturbing thought.

That is my only daughter, who will present this note to you. You have often heard me speak of my Agnes. During my illness she has scarcely left my side. And I have experienced the wonderful care and tenderness that only an adoring father can know.

Wouldn't be surprised, Thane thought, looking up at the girl whose soft brown eyes held a misty sparkle. "Don't let yourself go, Miss," he urged, and read on.

It is Agnes, Mr. Pardway, that is my one concern as I toss upon this bed. What will become of her? To be sure, there will be a little money left, even when your long standing loan is repaid. But I cannot hope that it will provide sufficiently for her.

Would it be asking too much of you to see what you can do for her in the way of securing some dignified employment? I am certain she could teach school, or be a governess. But that is only a minor problem that may take care of itself.

The thing that troubles me most is that she knows nothing of the world and will suddenly be thrust upon it. She was eighteen when I first fell ill, and at that time in a convent. But she came home to nurse and care for me, and has been at my side ever since. And my Agnes, who has always been so sheltered, will now have to face the world alone, knowing nothing of its dangers and pitfalls, and having no one to advise her.

In this extremity, Mr. Pardway, I turn to you who have been so unfailing in my time of trial. There is no flattery in it, sir, when I say that you are one of the few men I have met who is absolutely fair and above-board. (My experience with Lamson taught me that.) And I know that if you will undertake to help my girl secure a place, and perhaps invest for her what money there is left, she could not be in better hands.

And if you do undertake to advise Agnes, Mr. Pardway, I know that you will regard it as a sacred trust.

With many thanks for all the kindnesses you have shown me, and may God bless you.

Your obedient servant,

Jonathan Weatherly.

Certainly was a queer business, Thane said to himself. Not a bad old codger. Been quite a help getting the brokerage started, and all. But as for himself—what the hell did he know about advising young girls?

“Well, Miss Weatherly”— He cleared his throat, and bolstered himself for a glance at a weeping woman. Thank the Lord, the girl had dried her eyes. “I was going to say. Have you read this letter?”

“No.”

Brave girl, all right. Looked like she had some gump-tion. Held her head high. Awful pale. Shock of it, probably. “How long since he’s passed, Miss?”

“Just two weeks.”

Pale, but a warmth to her. Sort of radiant, as they called it. Handsome, too. Didn’t know much about men. Too simple. Seemed to feel, somehow, that he’d take it pretty hard. Hm! “This note, mam, tells me a lot about you.”

“And I know something of you, sir. Father always spoke so highly of you.”

Darn, what else could he say? “Tell you, mam. I don’t know much about what I’m expected to do. I guess we’d

better get acquainted before I make up my mind. Where you living?"

"At home. If you remember, that small house on Erie Street? You visited us once, father told me."

"O—yes." Gee, couldn't remember to save his life. "You bet. Nice place. Must be—must be pretty lonesome now."

"Yes," she agreed, wistfully, "it's lonely. You see I'm the only one in the house. I didn't think I could afford to keep Hannah any more. She was our maid."

"Own the house?"

"No. We've been renting for the last ten years."

"Now tell me this. Anything you interested in?"

"I'd like to sing. Though I'm not certain I have a voice worth cultivating."

"Find out soon enough," Thane assured her, a little skeptical, but theoretically open-minded, as he always was about the speculative expectations of others. "Howsomever, let's get on. Now, before I start messin' up your life—take a look at your dad's letter."

He watched her as she read. A slight, helpless trembling played over her. Those delicate fingers, knotted by apprehensiveness, tightened into small, tense fists.

Then he was aware of her soft, deep eyes gazing into his. "Turn the page, mam. There's more on the other side."

Hm. Funny look she gave him. For a second, it seemed as if she couldn't take eyes off him. Never saw eyes like that before. Something fatal to them. Would be awful hurt some day, those eyes.

"I've finished, Mr. Pardway."

He felt that the time had come to declare himself. "Don't know how you'll take it," he began. "But it seems to me I've got an idee that might work out more'n one way. Don't know as anybody's told you. But I'm a bachelor. Keep a big house. Nobody in it. 'Cept servants.

"I could use a secretary. In my house. See, most o' my own dealin's I think out away from this office. And I sort

of need a body to check over figgers an' reports. And look to it that my private manipulations don't get all gummed up. Guess I would 'a' had me some one long afore this—'cept I didn't know anybody I had confidence in. But Jonathan Weatherly's own daughter—why she'd like as not be trusty as her dad.

"But I tell yah. There's a thing or two a young girl ought to think about afore sayin' yes or no. Most year 'round it'll be routine. Check up on crop reports. Chart the prices. Easy enough. But if I found myself in the market all of a sudden, then the work'd be hard. Might have to figger all night, at times. Or go into conference with me an' a lotta men who'd smoke, sit around snappin' their galluses, and like as not, swear."

Damned old blunderbuss, he silently snapped at himself. Needn't have put in on the swearing. And when her skirt rustled, he might 'a' kept his eyes— Well, better get on with this.

"But if you're not sneezin' at the chance, Miss, why here's what goes with it. You'll have your own room. And the freedom of the place. And as for me—I'm at my club half the time. And Mis' Brown, my housekeeper, could sort of act like a chaperon to you. And with her and the butler to wait on you, you ought to have 'most everythin' you want. And as for your singin', I'll take me a look around and see if I can't rustle you a perfessor." He paused, and pulled at the large, pink lobe of his left ear, wondering if he had used quite the right word. For a moment he was annoyed by a vision of a sad old man in a frock coat bumbling hazily upon a massive piano as an overstuffed harlot bawled *Mother Is Waiting For You*.

"Now look at the other side. S'pose it don't work out. S'pose you don't like the work, or somethin'. Havin' some money of your own, you could move if you didn't like it.

"What's more—no need to decide this minute. Go on home and sleep on it. Whichever way you drift to—lemme know." He looked about as if something on the walls

might suggest another consideration. "Well," he mumbled after a minute, "seems to me that's 'bout all. 'Less you got an idee."

She felt his misty stare upon her, not direct, but diffused, as if he were lazily, moodily, gazing through a window.

"I really don't know what to say, Mr. Pardway. Except to thank you."

"Go on, mam." Sad smile, the girl had. Sort of softened her prim lips.

"You wouldn't mind if I thought about it? I'll let you know as soon as possible."

"You bet! Know just how you feel. Don't blame you a mite. And soon's you're settled in your mind—lemme know."

"I will," she promised, picking up her purse. "And thank you again, Mr. Pardway."

He escorted her to the adjoining room. "Hope you'll soon feel better, mam." He eyed his secretary. "Wilkins. Go out with this lady, call her a hack, and drive her home. No need to return to the office. Report to me to-morrow." He inclined his head to Agnes Weatherly, and with a "Good day, mam," closed the door to his sanctum.

Hm. What a narrow waist the girl had. And slender hands. And a little sliver of a foot. Put your arms about her—and like as not the bones'd crack.

Well, well. That was no way to think about it. Daughter of a man who had worked for him, and all. Better regard it as strictly business.

Point was, if she accepted his offer—what the hell would he do with her? Use a secretary? Might. Only trouble with that was, he'd have to work awful hard thinking up something for her to do. All that charting the bulges, and keeping track of Uncle Sam's tomfoolery about the weather and crops—all that didn't hurt. But it didn't do any good either. If it did, everybody'd be in clover.

Yah—that's what a damn fool he was. For years he'd

sworn up and down that he'd never have a woman around if he could help it. And now he'd swallowed this tale of woe hook, line and sinker—and was heading straight for skirts.

God—damn!

CHAPTER III

FIVE BITS OF FRINGE

IN retrospect, the industrial, business, social and sporting worlds are like teeming, many-colored tapestries eternally in the process of weaving. As the years roll on, and more of the spinning scroll meets the eye, it becomes evident that the pattern changes slowly, interminably. A certain motif is lost in the maze. An impressive figure gives way, and gradually fades into the background. And some satellite of the past seasons now outshines its former sun, and in assuming the dominant, magnetic position, sheds its splendiferous radiance over all. So the human shuffle of shade and shape and substance goes unendingly on.

The student of such successive progression and retrocession cannot help noticing that the pieces of fringe at the fag-end of the magic carpet are nowhere traceable in its flurry of forms. This is so true of the myriad onhangers of the world of the wheat.

Like the lifelong supers of the theater, the rubbers-down of the prize ring, the social secretaries of the élite, the ward-heelers of politics—so were the innumerable bits of fringe that plied about the shadowy rim of Chicago's Board of Trade. Eighth-chasers, shin-plaster straddlers, "paper wizids," tipsters and what-nots—presences perhaps, but of no standard proportions in that sea of sharks, swordfish, lizards, small-fry and the shoals of sardines who swam about the Wheat Pit.

Four of these bits of fringe were hanging over the bar at William Meyer's Beer Hall on a February afternoon. They were Solomon Einfangle, a sleazy-skinned Bavarian

Jew, small, sharp-eyed, neurose, who was willing to explain to any one who would listen, his theory of the wheat-rye ratio which should predicate price—Major Jefferson Oleander, an amiable Southerner who addressed any man two years his junior with a softly intoned, "Son, what're you-all fixin' to do?"—Will Ewing, a derelict newspaperman—and Dwight Vonda, a gay little dandy with silky chin whiskers, who had been a much too outspoken professor of economics, and was now peddling his charts of the currents in the wheat world from door to door on LaSalle Street.

As Thane Pardway strolled into thé place, these men hailed him, made way for him, and closed in about him. It was as if a nebulous social circle had finally achieved its nucleus.

There was an ease and largeness of manner about Pardway as he listened, nodding or clearing his throat between drinks, every now and again shifting an arm or a leg. After a bit he removed his gray, squarish derby, placed it on the bar, and rubbed his hand over those sudden, impudent bulges that reared up like ramparts from his heavy brows.

"Have another?"

Of course it was Thane's voice, not flat, as it had been, but rich, throaty. For he was proposing a rite that he regarded, both selfishly and socially, as being of vastly more importance than the technical position of a market in which he was involved.

They had another, and Pardway flung a bill on the bar.

"No, no," Oleander insisted. "See here, son. This is on me."

Thane smiled, pulled at his cheek, and winked at the bartender. "What's ailin' you, Major?" he inquired, as of a thoroughly rational person showing sudden symptoms of insanity. "Don't you know your money's counterfeit here?"

The incident was passed over. There was the clink of

glasses being snatched up between nimble fingers, and doused under the bar.

"Mr. Pardway," Vonda whispered, as the others were debating the line-elevator supply, "might I have a word with you?"

"Sure thing." The broker ordered another round, heaved to with a "Bottoms up!" and then took Vonda off to the back room. "Shoot," he said.

Vonda, it seemed, had a proposition. If only he could get the backing, his trade summaries would be printed, distributed daily, become one of the important factors in the—

As Pardway listened, he wondered why he had anything to do with these fellows. Still, the Professor wasn't such a bad sort. Why not lend a helping hand, and—

"I know," Vonda was saying, "I haven't repaid that money I borrowed last—"

"Forget it. How much'll it cost you to set you up?"

Well, it started on a small scale, and expanded conservatively—

"Sleep on it," Thane advised. "Come to my office to-morrow morning. Anything under five thousand—O.K."

The little man thanked him, and then lowered his voice significantly. "Harper's in town."

The name was not without its image, but Thane merely repeated, "Harper?"

"Yes. That Cincinnati man who went back on Bill McHenry and Joe Preston."

"O—I remember. Some poltroonery there, eh?"

"He's been seen with Lamson and Kershaw."

Pardway poured himself another drink. "You don't tell me!"

Vonda, marveling at his benefactor's capacity, said nothing.

"Well, I'll be on my way," Thane announced. "You come around to-morrow and get your grubstake."

"I will. And if I find out any more," Vonda added hastily, "I'll let you know."

Pardway's shining black eyes, like two glistening marbles in globs of whipped cream, were unrevealing. The nostrils of his broad nose flexed as he breathed deeply. His large, pinkish lips, round and poutish, spread out into a streak, and curved down his stony chin. He tossed a large hand up, at once bidding those about him a good day and dismissing them. And with a "See you in church," he swaggered to the door.

As he was leaving the place, he heard the Major drawl, "Better watch his step. He's had considerable."

And to himself he muttered, "Ain't wet my gullet yet."

But even when his entrails were burning, Thane Pardway's steps were firm, regular, as if his legs were pursuing a purpose, rather than a destination. It was the mark of a man who comes to know, as did others, that people involuntarily fell in with his walk—that the strong, vibrant rhythm of his living and his pacing swept lesser bodies into his stride. Many a person, seeing him march down the street, was possessed by the notion that he was a man dogs followed home.

. . .

Pardway tramped over to Eugene Prager's. And though several of his cronies were there, he kept to himself, indulging in a fit of solitary drinking.

Vonda's hint as to the intent of the Cincinnati man had touched a match to a damp, slow-burning resentment. The fume and smoke of ill-humor were going to his head. He didn't exactly know why, and it wasn't like him to trouble to find out.

The damn poltrooner, he said to himself, poaching on the Chicago preserve, eh? And with that skunk Lamson! And that Kershaw crowd! Well, maybe they'd do something. And then again, maybe they wouldn't. They'd have to be parlous smart to whirl wheat with Tha' Pardway around.

Right here and now, by golly, he felt in an ugly mood. And being as he had an ugly job ahead of him, it was all to the good. He was going to give that fiz-chippy the gate.

He got to the street and hailed a cab. As the wheels rolled over the cobblestones, he was telling himself that his affair with Rosa Duveyne had to end sometime. And he might as well break it off before she did. Only one thing he hated more than breaking off with a woman was—a woman who broke off with him.

Come to think of it, she hadn't been so bad. Except that there wasn't any love lost between 'em. Still, that made it easier to cash-in. Besides, she wasn't going out of her way to please him these days. Better look around for another girl. New brooms sweep clean.

As he entered the little house in which Miss Duveyne was kept, he felt it ominously silent. "Rosa," he called, "Ros—a!"

No Rosa. And the maid—out. Funny. Awful quiet. Think a parson'd been buried. Well, he'd wait.

He was stretched out on the lounge when his mistress appeared. She had come from the back of the house.

"'Lo." Just a bit of fringe in his life, he reflected. Sort of pretty, sort of silky, but really no part of him. "What's your hurry, Rosie?"

"Hurry!" she exclaimed. "Are you being sarcastic?"

"I reckon so," he returned lazily. Hm. Sort of dressed—and not dressed. Two hooks loose in the middle of the back. And he'd lay odds that there wasn't much on underneath.

"My, but you're pleasant."

He grunted. "Got another bracelet, I see."

"O! You do!"

Well, he decided, no use going on with this. Better start breaking it to her—and not so easy. Go easy, and they didn't believe you.

"Rosa," he began, "got somethin' serious to say to you—"

"And I," she broke in, "have something serious to tell you!"

"It'll wait."

There was a rustle in the back of the house. Then a man of medium height, stocky, blond, bristling, came into the room. "It won't wait!" he snapped.

Lamson, Pardway was saying to himself, Frank Lamson! Lamson with his red bull neck. Lamson with his eager, pop eyes. Lamson with his trick mustache, yellow and waxed. By all holy, jumping crickets—Frank Lamson!

Thane got to his feet, and reached for his hat. "'Tain't enough you got to bollix up my business," he snorted, eyeing his former partner. "You got to go stealin' my women, what's more." He set his stiff hat on his round head, and tilted it down from behind. "All right, Lamson!"

He turned to the woman who had been his mistress. "You're a little fool, Rosa," he stated, unemotionally. "The only reason this fellah wants you is because he thinks it'll break my heart." .

He went up to Lamson and handed him the key to the house. "You're welcome," he said, and made his way out.

Fact of the matter was, he thought, Lamson was doing him a good turn. Even so—he'd fix that boy one of these fine days.

Huh! The nerve of him, to go gerrymandering on Tha' Pardway's property!

CHAPTER IV

THANE PUTS HIS WARD TO WORK

ON Wabash Avenue, near 11th Street, a small block of gray stone marked PARDWAY stood alongside the curb. From this landing station a narrow plank walk led to a flight of whitish, limestone stairs. These rose abruptly to a large, black, iron-buckled door.

Thane Pardway's house, like every other in the block, was a blunt reminder of the haste which characterized building after the Chicago Fire. There was a pallid, front-stone exterior, a bay window on each floor—and not another feature asking for mention.

To the right of the door was a brass-knobbed bell-ringer. When pulled out it produced a startling jangle. Then Henry Cullom, to whom Thane referred as the "biggest, blackest and importantest nigger in the United States," would come to the door. He invariably glanced down at the visitor with the eye of one who cannot believe that those he waits upon are superior to himself. And with that same proud, offended-by-life bearing, he would lead the way into the library, bow stiffly, and disappear.

The library, marked off from the parlor by the half-open folding-doors, was the most interesting room in the house. Here, amidst the massive oblongs of fumed oak and dull red plush, Thane Pardway stored his most cherished possessions. There were some seven hundred volumes, history, biography, erotica—many of them exquisitely stamped and illuminated, every one of them costing over thirty dollars "a throw," hardly one of them ever opened.

They formed the background for other snatches at immortality that had more call upon Pardway. There were

two magnificent suits of armor, burnished and emblazoned, standing in diagonal corners. At the sight of these statuary in steel, a surge of pride would roll up in his throat. Such was his salute to the Damascene men of Mars who retained their chilly sheen long after other such effigies had crumbled into rust and grime.

He rarely mentioned any of his prizes but those kept behind the panes of a Sheraton secretary. The two Ming jars, however, the chipped fragment of a Mycenæan frieze, and that blue amphora—at times he would speak of them. And it was a trifle saddening to listen. For he stressed their value and anciency—seeming to have no consciousness of form. And yet, as he caressed them with his broad palms—it was not difficult to see that he held communion with these relics in glazed dust, that they called to him in that language of beauty to which he could reply only in silent, shamed adoration.

Yet it was his paintings that were most meaningful to this crude apostle of self-regalement. Often he stood before these magically moving revelations of color and mood, his huge form swaying in dreamful meditation. It was only then that he knew himself to sigh—rather heavily, for he felt that beauty was so far from him. He wondered, too, why the deep warm dust of that Millet, the massive moodiness of the Decamps, and the shabby sensuous pathos of Peter Fendi—were endeared to such as himself. Was it the soft, spinning dream of the painting that took his breath away? Or was it the cold, clawing passion of the very woman? And often he muttered, “Christ knows”—thus establishing a momentary truce in the eternal wars of the senses that went on within him.

It was in this library, a month after their first meeting, that Thane and Agnes were seated before the coal fire.

“Well, mam,” he was saying, “seems like you’re going to try your hand at secretarying.” He toyed with the poker. “What’ve you been up to since the last time?”

There was something, not very meaningful to him, about studying voice with Madame Cecile of the Balatka Academy.

"Hope you'll like it here, Miss."

Lovely, she said, it was just lovely.

"'Tain't bad."

She stirred uneasily.

"What's the matter, mam? Why don't you rest back comfortable like?"

"O—I don't know." She folded her small, frail hands.

"But it's so nice here," she murmured, "so warm."

He rose and walked around the room, holding a lighted match to the gas-arms. "There," he said. "Guess you'll feel better now."

"I didn't mind it—much."

Hm. Knew nothing about playing the game. Felt shy of him, and didn't hesitate to admit it. "Don't worry 'bout me, mam. Soon's I get you straightened out, I'll take myself off. Won't see me for quite a while."

"Are you going on a business trip, Mr. Pardway?"

"What'd you say, mam?" Funny, how sleepy a fellow got when the market was dull. "O, yes, I got a little business out of town. Howsomever, that isn't getting us started." He pointed to the Spanish mission table. "You sit over there. Find pencil and paper. Take a few notes."

Moves as if she had no body, he said to himself, watching her cross the room.

"Now a good secretary," he began, "don't need any advice as to where to get anything. No matter if you never heard of what I'm goin' tell you to get—you get 'em, see?"

"Number one. You'll find that your Uncle Sam spends a lot of time and money making out crop reports. Get 'em. Also, you'll find there's a lot of fools in the world who do little else but try to figger out if it's going to rain or snow—and when. Get all the weather reports. What's more, you'll find there's a lotta fellahs do little else than sit

around figgerin' up if wheat'll rise or fall. Same thing about stocks. Get all that sort of material you can lay hands on. And whatever you get will refer you to a lot more junk. Business services. And chartists. And prophets that talk higher'n God A'mighty."

He stuck his boots out on the marble hearth. "Now here's another thing. Get the New York and Chicago papers every day. Get yourself some graph paper. Keep track of the quotations on all the grains. And on a list of stocks that I'll hand you some other time.

"And do the same with money. When you get into finance, you'll find there's all sorts of money. Time money, and sixty-day paper, and acceptances, and what-nots. You'll have to be able to tell me, at a moment's notice, what any sort of money's worth. And that goes for metals. And commodities. And foreign exchanges. And—"

By golly, it didn't seem to fluster her! There she was now, head tilted down so that her face was out of the picture. Except, every other minute, when he mentioned something that surprised her. Then there'd be a soft, wondering flash to her eyes. But it didn't last long. In a second the little fist would close around the pencil, and write on. And she didn't bother him with fool questions. Seemed as if she thought to figure it out later.

"Is that all?" she asked, looking up after the few minutes in which he had been silent.

"Ought to be," he replied, smiling. "But it ain't. Now listen close, and you'll get the key to the whole business." He frowned impressively. "Somewhere in the world, mam, at any given time, wheat is growing. So you see, there's always a harvest goin' on. Now we fellahs that buy and sell big, we don't monkey with cash grains. We deal in futures. For instance, this is February. Right now we're dealin' in grain for the May, July and September delivery. Some of it's not planted yet. That's what makes wheat so speculative. And bein' that way, it's a good thing for

a trader to be sure of every little thing. Right now I can't start to show you how it all works out. Sometime in the near future, though, I'll do some tall explainin' of what you don't understand.

"Anyway," he went on, "this wheat that's always bein' harvested. Pret' near every day I get reports on it. Some come by letter. The most important are cabled. Special correspondents all over the world keep me posted. I get information from Liverpool, Moscow, Winnipeg, Budapest, Tunis, Buenos Aires, and a lot more places like that.

"All these reports come to my office. The most important ones are in code. I'll leave instructions with 'Parson' Lerch to turn the code book over to you. Lerch is head man at the office."

He paused that she might catch up with him. "Now analyze those reports. You'll have to know just what goes on in the wheat markets of the world. Because no matter where somethin' happens in wheat—it's reflected here. And like many things, the opposite is also true. That's why you'll have to keep track of foreign as well as domestic markets." He glanced at her. Gee, a soft woman. Sweet. Well, he'd better keep his eyes-right. "Got all this down?"

"I believe so, Mr. Pardway."

"Now you'll need a workroom. Far's I can see, this library'll do. Use that table. Or if you want, buy yourself a desk. And whatever you want in the line of furniture, just go down to A. H. Andrews and tell 'em to put it to my account. And whatever you want for your own room, why get it at Tobey's. Get anything you want."

"Yes," she answered shyly. "But I don't think I'll need a thing."

Good sign, he thought, that she was taking it all as a business proposition. Tell by the look of her that charity wasn't her line.

"And about your personal affairs. Your pay'll be mailed from my office. If it don't suit—speak up the

next time I see you. And for the time being, take your pay and the money left by your dad, and start a savings account at the Corn Exchange.

"Now every time you walk into that bank, keep a weather eye out for the boss, Hutchinson. Mind you, don't be a Paul Pry. But if some morning you're scoutin' around there, and see the old buzzard with an awful sour look to him—I want to know about it. And if ever you see him smilin', which won't come oftener than hens' teeth, make a bee line for my office. Most of the time, though," he added grudgingly, "his face won't be any more of a give-away than a mud-pie."

He got to his feet. "Only one more thing. As we're goin' see a lot of each other. And as I'm pinch-hittin' for a nearest relative. And as I'm twice your age—guess there won't be any objections to my callin' you Agnes. If you think different, say so."

"I'd rather that, Mr. Pardway. It's not so stiff."

"Agnes it is, then," he concluded, turning his back upon her and striding into the hall. He got into his overcoat and made his departure known by slamming the door.

CHAPTER V

THE PARDWAY FAMILY MAN

THANE PARDWAY was thinking about his brother, Daniel. Hm. Hadn't seen the old skinflint in a dog's age. Go over and get a line on how his store was making out.

Sure was a funny duck, was Danny. Like himself. Only not so much so. Had the gumption, but didn't like to show it. Didn't care what people thought, but made off he did. Sort of conservative. Still, ran the Blockade in the Civil War. Just like him to do a daring thing once in a while, and then lay low. Great caution to him. Wise as an owl, but didn't sit around looking like one. Had the fastest growing department store in Chicago, but didn't brag about it. Darn fool, could do worse than brag about The BAZAAR.

Thane entered the store, cast an appraising glance at a smiling wench who was trying on a glove, and telling himself that there was many a pebble on the beach, strode on. He walked up to the Second Floor, passed around the partition back of the Men's Clothing, and opened the door of a plain, clean office. "Hello!" he boomed. "How's the family man?"

Daniel Pardway sat behind his desk, fingering several dress-goods samples. "Basket weave," he mumbled, "no wear." And then to his brother, "Hello, Tha'. How you been?"

Thane pulled off his ulster, slung it atop a bookcase filled with brown cardboard files. He selected the only arm-chair in the room. "Been all right."

"You look groggy." The merchant eyed his brother sharply. "Take your feet off'n my desk."

"Ain't a desk," Thane retorted. "Looks like what's left of a busted packing case."

"You don't like my furniture, don't do me the favor o' gettin' it scrummy!"

Thane lazily surveyed his brother. Hm, scant six feet. Light hair, cut old-fashioned, and brushed down the sides of those lean cheeks. A blue-gray eye, some of the sea in it. Features cut diamond sharp. And always busy, busy, busy. Regular Jack-in-the-box.

"Tha', what'd you come over for?"

"Talk."

"Never knew anybody to talk so much, and do so little."

Thane chuckled. "Sure is funny, Danny, when you try to say somethin' chipper. Sense of humor like a hyena. Laughs when he's mad!"

The elder brother's long, thin nose twitched deprecatingly. "Haven't been to dinner in ages," he remarked. "Why don't you visit a respectable house sometimes?"

"Too damn dull."

"Always want to be entertained. Hm. Why don't you stop bein' the talk of the town? Go about your business. Get married. Settle down. Raise a family. Take a tip from me."

"You're no sight for sore eyes, Danny."

"Wouldn't drink so much—your eyes wouldn't be sore."

"And if you," Thane returned elaborately, "if you weren't married to the Virgin Mary's chaperone—you wouldn't be so sour."

Daniel looked out the window. "Might be a truth to that," he admitted tardily. "Still, Tha', don't see what you hold against Abigail."

"Too holy."

The owner of The BAZAAR diverted the conversation to things he thought more important. "You're keeping to

your desk, and not breaking out with a market rash. I take it?"

"Haven't been near The Pit for months."

"Glad to hear it. Tha! Hope you'll stay that way. Nothing like buying and selling, buying and selling. Gambling—" he made a face. "Not worth the candle."

Useless to argue about that, the broker decided. "By the way," he drawled, "there's sorta new development in my life. I got a ward."

"A—which?"

"Sure. You remember Weatherly! Old fellow that used to be my head man! Well, he up and died. And one day—" He briefly stated the facts of his guardianship.

"Well, Tha! I'll take care of this girl if you feel it must be done," Daniel proposed. "Having a regular establishment, and all, I'm in a much better position to assume the burden."

Agnes Weatherly's benefactor frowned and slowly shook his head. "Nothin' doin'!"

"Knew you'd say that," his brother shot. "Tell you why. The minute you mentioned her—you were already promotin' her to a position she didn't rate. Far's I remember, her father wasn't your head man. Just a clerk, that's all." The glint of a probing severity stuck out of his eye. "Tha! you know damn well that a young, innocent girl could be in better company."

"Mebbe."

"Then what're you botherin' with her for?"

"For fun."

"Well," Daniel stated busily, "chances are that if she's a good girl, she'll get on all right. And if she isn't—I'm not the man to worry about her. 'Sides, I'm busy now. So you can traipse along."

Thane yawned and got into his coat.

"And say," the merchant ventured, "Fanny Alliston's coming to dinner next Saturday, Abigail told me. Better drop over. Nice woman. Bet she has a neat pile salted

down. Not divorced either. Widow. Ought to be just your style."

"You got parlous little notion of what my style is, Danny. Widows were my weakness when I was nineteen. Now they give me the willies."

Daniel nodded. Knew all about this brother of his, he was saying to himself. Libertine, that was what. "Tell me, Tha'—" And just as he was about to ask Agnes Weatherly's age, Thane said:

"Twenty," and left.

CHAPTER VI

A HOUSEKEEPER AND A SECRETARY

MRS. EMALINE BROWN was a tall, thin, square-shouldered woman of forty-eight. She had been a parson's daughter, the barren wife of a ne'er-dowell mason, and when widowed at forty, had become Thane Pardway's housekeeper. Prim, vigorous and austere, she handled her master's accounts with scrupulous accuracy, wore herself thin erasing dust, prepared dignified meals without adding what she termed "frills and fancies" and managed to perform a goodly measure of her duties without regarding herself as a domestic.

She accepted her station and her superior with frank distaste. But she never thought of seeking another position. After all, she had told herself more than once, Pardway paid her more than she was likely to get elsewhere. And at Christmas she always received far more than she might have expected. None of these considerations, however, made her any happier. Her employer, she decided, was just a big-hearted fool—though from all she could gather, probably pretty level-headed in business. But what a man! Never came to the table till the "vittels" were cold. The fool! Might have had hot food for his money.

The introduction of Agnes into the household was something of a problem to Mrs. Brown. Agnes was her charge, according to Pardway. And yet, she was to have no jurisdiction over her. "Just keep an eye out for her," he had said. "And mind your own business." Well, well! Things had come to a pretty pass! How could she keep an eye out—and still mind her own business?

As the days went by the housekeeper found that she had

little to complain of in Agnes. The girl set about her work, and seemed to be actually doing something. And then she sang, rather pleasantly. And certainly, she put on no airs. Still, there was one thing about her—

A Catholic. No, a body couldn't swallow that. Wasn't bad enough Pardway had a negro butler. Had to have a Catholic secretary as well! Of course, he wasn't a religious-minded man. O, no! But still. A Catholic!

And yet, she thought, there might be some good in it. A girl like that, who was strictly observant, wouldn't—

Truth to tell, she hadn't seen any loose tendency in Mr. Pardway. Dignity itself when he spoke to her. But then, a single man, with all the time he spent away from home—

Mrs. Emaline Brown sighed as she mounted the carpeted stairs to the second floor. For the hundredth time she wondered what he wanted with the Weatherly girl. Keep a sharp eye out, eh? Well, Emaline Brown might be a wee bit sharper than he had looked for!

She stopped before the door of the back room, listened a moment, and then knocked.

"Yes?"

Mrs. Brown opened the door. "Mr. Pardway's just come, Agnes. He'd like a word with you, he says, before dinner." As she spoke she glared at the crucifix above the huge, four-posted bed.

"Please tell him I'll be right down," Agnes replied, somewhat flustered. "I'm just doing my hair."

Mrs. Brown flicked a speck from the black silk that hung over her sparse bosom, and swept down the hall. "Curl papers!" she indignantly snapped at herself.

After knocking about the clubs and bars for several weeks, Thane decided that he'd turn up at his home and see how things were going. Perhaps, he thought, the girl had become a little more human. Certainly that piano he had bought for her, and the few things for her room, ought to have thawed her out.

He could see her as she came down the stair—a sort of yellowish ghost of a girl in shimmering silk. Not as tall as most of the women who were willowy, but nevertheless, willowy. Thin white arms, somewhat gangly, but softened by the tan net sleeves. And her face, pale, a little radiant, excited. And her deep brown, simple eyes.

“Is there anything you want, Mr. Pardway?”

“No. I’m goin’ be in to-night. Wonder if you’ll have dinner with me?”

“I’d love to.” She glanced at the piano, and swept her hand over it. “So lovely,” she said. “How can I thank you?”

“Don’t know. Never get any thanks in this world, they say. Guess you better save it for the next.” But that, he thought, was a little out of her style. “Say, got any information on the wheat laid out yet?”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, brightening as he became impersonal. “I’ve organized it all so that I can tell you a good many things.”

Girlish enthusiasm, was his silent comment. And he asked, indifferently, “What’s call money these days?”

“Two per cent.”

Hm! Well, he’d trip her on this one. “What’s the estimate for the Prairie Provinces?”

She referred to the sheaves of notes on the library table. “Manitoba—”

“Nev’ mind, mam. Just wanted to see if you knew what the Prairie Provinces were. Hm. You must ‘a’ put in some good, hard licks.”

She sat prim, smiling, pleased, almost challenging him.

“Looka here, mam. You got any notion of what’s goin’ happen in The Pit during the next few days?”

Novice-like, she plunged into the terminology of the world of the wheat. “The advance, started three days ago, on a slightly shrinking visible supply, is likely to continue.”

“What makes you think that?” he demanded sharply.

"Why, I suppose I'm wrong, Mr. Pardway. But the cables say Europe is buying. And if they need more, and the supply here is less—"

"Advance won't continue," he decreed. "There's bumper rye in Central Europe. As for the visible supply here, it always shrinks at the end of the month. Nothin' to that."

"O, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "I knew I was getting somewhere when you took me seriously, even if I was wrong."

"Don't worry about bein' wrong, mam. You're on the right track. You're beginnin' to see how it all works."

"At first," she said, "I thought you made this place for me—out of kindness."

"You don't say!" A slow, fat smile spread over his large face. "Kindness, eh? Well, I don't know. Ain't done much outa kindness in my life. Still, Jonathan Weatherly's daughter had a call on me."

"But that aside. How's things been in the house while I was away?"

"Perfectly lovely, sir."

"Don't sir me. Even Mis' Brown doesn't sir me. Or Henry. By the way, he fetched and carried for you all right?"

"Indeed, Mr. Pardway. I do hope I haven't been any trouble."

"Trouble? Don't you worry about bein' a trouble. I never hope to have nicer troubles." He paused, feeling that he had better not get too familiar. Seemed as if she couldn't be touched with a ten-foot pole. "If ever you hanker after anythin', mam, why I want you to say so."

Her eyes warmed thankfully, and she shook her head.

"What sort of a woman are you anyway?" he wanted to know. "Never met one before that didn't go grabbin' all she could get."

"There isn't a thing," she insisted.

"Well, no sense temptin' fate. But if sudden-like, you

start wantin'—let's hear about it." And remembering that he was supposed to have been out of town, he inquired after the weather.

"I have a chart of that, too. Would you like—"

"No! Look-a here, mam. I ain't all wheat. I just asked human-like. You know, we all talk about the weather when there ain't nothin' better to hand."

She smiled. "It's been very pleasant, Mr. Pardway."

"Done any skatin'?"

"Yes. I was out on Stockton Lake one morning. It was very nice." She looked up at him. "Do you skate?"

First friendly peep out of her, he reflected. "Nope. Big fat fellah like me— Still, I guess I might 'a'. But when I was a little shaver, mam, I didn't have time for things like that. No, not me!" And he sighed—a sigh out of the storehouse of prop sighs.

She felt sorry for him and did not quite know what to say. "Did you have a nice trip?"

"Yah, pretty good. Why do you ask?"

"You've been so frank and lovely with me," she began, seeming to elude some restraining instinct, "I'm afraid I'm doing you an injustice. But I think I saw you, about two weeks ago, in The BAZAAR. And I thought— Well, it must have been a mistake."

"That's no mistake, mam. That's a fact. I'll tell you. That first day you came here, you seemed sort o' shy o' me. So I decided to fade away and give you a chance to get your bearings."

"O—but you shouldn't have!" she declared. "This is your house. My feelings shouldn't—"

"Then you admit I guessed your feelings right?"

She lowered her eyes.

And mechanically—he laughed.

Didn't work, he reflected. It'd take something else but a horse laugh to get her looking at him again.

"Wasn't laughing because I guess right, mam. Just—I don't know. Sorta because I understand how you feel.

First there was that funny offer from a queer fellah. And then when you came here—you felt a little like a servant. Sort of a come-down to be workin' for somebody that's not as well bred as you—"

What a lovely, throbbing voice, she thought, smiling up at him.

"Say," he boomed, hearing a sudden bustle down in the kitchen. "Must be near dinner time. I tell you, I'm hungry. And say, I'm takin' a party of friends to theater to-night. Goin' see Fanny Dauvray. And you spruce up, mam, and come along. And after the show, I'll have you meet some of the company. And—"

Henry Cullom entered the room. "Dinner is served, sir," he announced with an awesome punctiliousness.

CHAPTER VII

CONFESSIONAL, SELF-CATECHISM, CROSS-PURPOSES

THE soul of Father Dion O'Hare dwells in a flaming awareness of the living, breathing, consciousness of the Christ. This is a spiritual rapture that transcends time and place, that makes him see everything as part of an eternal present.

He sits behind the lattice of the confessional, idly fingering his stole. He must try, he tells himself, to force his failing attention upon the simple, worldly souls who drain their sinfulness off into him. Into him—small channel that he is, of the Great Church.

But it is too much, too much. Ah, each time to be tender, understanding, consoling and forgiving! And all over the little nothings.

He must stop day-dreaming! His fancies, processional of impossibilities that they are, must not philander in the eternal dusk of the Cathedral. He must listen to the whimperings of self-immolation. Or else (painful, ludicrous thought) he will be sinning against sin.

But why won't the little white flower face of Agnes Weatherly stop prattling? Why won't she stop imagining herself so wayward? Ah—because she has not sinned. Of course, she cannot imagine that to be true. It is so beautiful to repent—over nothing. If she sins her refuge will be a soul-filling silence.

O, the wearisomeness of it! All day long these virginal hearts throb against his consciousness. So dull, their little concepts of wrong doing. So white, their lies. So pale, their venom. So vagrant, their neglect of penance.

But how they love to confess, these virginal hearts. O—for one incorrigible sinner whose transgression might not be boresome!

“Absolved, my child.”

It is only the innocent who are not interested in innocence. For them there will be no revelation in what Agnes was thinking when she left the Cathedral of the Holy Name.

She had been absolved, she was saying to herself. And yet, should she have been? Not that Father Dion was over indulgent. But had she told him everything? Yes, came the answering echo, everything that might have been told—

But what of those other things? What was it that made her feel so queer about Mr. Pardway? Why did she sometimes stammer and blush when he entered the room? How did she know, even when her back was turned, that he was looking at her? And why did it make her heart beat faster? And how could she always be certain, just the moment before, that their eyes—would meet?

How strange it was when he spoke! For a moment her ears ached with his jubilant baritone. And then she would find herself marveling at his curious phraseology. There would be those Yankee expressions emerging from a slightly nasal twang. And then those coarse, brutal, sometimes beautiful words of ships and sailors. And, of course, the technical talk of The Pit, but somehow more real, more human than that of the trade summaries.

And how those glamorous phrases, flashing out of the facets of his many experiences, would dazzle her as they dramatized a story. Ah, this man did love to talk about himself, about the romantic episodes that had colored his life. To be sure, it was vulgar to speak of one's self incessantly. And yet, how fascinating he could be. And why was it that everything he said stuck to her so? His story of the *Caraccas Maid*, for instance.

It seemed that he had come out victorious in a terrible

battle on a windjammer. And each time he told the story, he recounted every broken head and bloody nose. And right at the most thrilling moment he would halt, look at her, shake his head, and say, "Guess that ain't so edifyin', mam." And his heavy lids would descend over those black, glistening eyes.

He was the only person she had ever known who vouchsafed no creed, no principle, no morality. "Get what I want," he had told her. "When I want it—see? That's me." And he would tell of the things he had wanted, and how he had gotten them.

There was no one, it seemed, with whom he would not compare himself. "That fellah Nero," he once remarked. "I'm sorta like him. 'Cept I'd 'a' had a darn sight better reason for burnin' a city. Still, if he wanted to write some poetry, and that was the only way he could do it—" He shrugged, and drained off his glass with a mighty orgie glee, as if he were some fire-eating Vulcan greedily gulping down the raging flames of Rome. Then slowly he came out of his trance, and peering down upon her as if he dwelled in some transcendant chaos, asked, "Do you like poetry, Agnes?"

There! It was one of those questions that made her hate him. He brought it forth slowly, smacked his lips over it, seemed to see it take visible form in the air. His eyes would fix upon her with a cunning, self-appreciative glow. He was gloating, she knew, over his having asked a question that had cornered her. She grew self-conscious. She couldn't say no. And to answer yes would be doing just what he expected of her—

And once, when he had so demonstrated his ability to "tie her into knots"—she determined to make no reply, to steel herself for the ordeal of his eyes. When the tension eased off, when she presumed he had forgotten about it, that swaggering rumble reared out of him. "Don't blame you! I hate to have to say just what the other fellah expects. Only I don't blush me red in the face about it."

A pitying leer glimmered in his eyes. He sent his fist crashing into the steel belly of a coat of mail. And snickering to himself with a slimy satisfaction, he strode out of the room.

And why, she wondered, why did she care?

As Agnes, exhausted by her self-catechism, had seated herself in the library, and was working upon an export graph—another woman, much in the same mood, similarly whipped up by the same man, was militantly striding down Wabash Avenue.

Her name was Kate Mercer. She was a large-boned Amazon of thirty-five, swathed in brocades and furs. She had a way of throwing her head back at every few steps as if reasserting her determination to make an end to some disagreeable matter. She was not cudgeling her brain with the whys and wherefores of emotional attractions. She had learned that real mysteries go unsolved and dreaded the day when her mind might master the secrets of her heart. Old warhorse of the passions that she was, she had long since given up prancing in one place, and now conserved her energies for the attack. And though she was much more overwrought than Agnes Weatherly, her concern was with that essentially practical consideration of womankind—personal appearance. She was wondering, as her heavy silks swished along to her rapid strides, if her bustle were coming out of place. It seemed to be sliding around so! And it wouldn't do to have one's behind—before.

After Henry Cullom had shown her in, she demanded of Agnes, "Where's Thane?"

The girl said she didn't know, that he ought to be home soon.

With a glare and a "humph" the visitor announced, "I'll wait." Then snatching off her bonnet, she flung it on the piano, and flounced into a chair. She crossed her arms,

and made an ominous, scratching sound by grazing her long nails against the metallic brocade of her sleeves.

Agnes, as she worked on, could not help venturing an occasional glance at this vibrantly hostile woman. There was a vast burst of red, horsey hair over Kate Mercer's whitish, freckled face. Those glistening blue eyes, rather far apart, held a challenging, "don't try to out-smart me" glint. The delicate bridge of her nose tapered down to coarse, flaring nostrils. The long, thin over-lip did not quite meet its partner—and between the two glistened an arc of sharp, prominent teeth. A rather undeveloped chin sloped down to a thick, imposing neck. Here was a dashing, presumptuous, over-sexed woman, capable of overwhelming emotions—certain to be unpleasant upon the slightest provocation.

Somehow, Agnes felt, she did not want to be about when Pardway came in. She gathered up her papers, and said, "You don't mind if I leave for a few minutes?"

Kate Mercer laughed through her nose. "I don't mind," she returned, "if you drop dead."

Agnes hurried up to her room. But she could not keep at her work. She was wondering if some misfortune had befallen that handsome, commanding woman.

After a while she heard the door slam, the murmur of voices—and presumed that Pardway had come.

Ah, if she were some servant of the Blessed Sacrament, she would gently put her arms about that unfortunate woman, and guide her slowly over the great flagstones of the Cathedral. And they would pause before the five crowded canvases in the choir that portrayed the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And somehow, between her inviolable self and the wandering soul of that sinful woman, there would be a compassionate communion sanctified by the dim peace of the cool stones.

Now her dream was distorted. From below she heard a passion pitched contralto in strident accusation. And then Pardway's growl, "Christ! Can't you shut up? Do you

hafta bring the police?" For a few minutes there was the woman's quavering voice, broken off by an occasional rumble. And then Pardway's, "It's not so, Kate! She isn't anything of the kind."

Then Pardway, from the hall, was calling, "Agnes. O—Agnes!"

As she went to the head of the stair, it occurred to her that this was the first time he had used her given name. "Yes, Mr. Pardway?"

"Come on down," he called, "right away."

When she came into the library, Pardway said, "Agnes, want you to know Mrs. Mercer. She tells me you ain't been introduced proper—"

Suddenly Kate Mercer's hand shot up. Something hissed in the air. Pardway stepped in between them. A vial fell to the floor. Mrs. Mercer ran into the hall. The bang of the door reverberated through the house.

CHAPTER VIII

A SINNER TELLS HIS STORY

MOST men proclaim their goodness, their high-mindedness. Not Thane Pardway. He would talk by the hour about his strength, cunning, sense of mastery. But those deeds inspired by goodfellowship or an unconcerned altruism, he never mentioned. Moreover, he had an instinctive, mocking disdain for men who made themselves out to be worthy citizens and kindly souls. "That Albright fellah's awful big and fine," was his contribution to irony.

And so, as he contemplated telling Agnes about his relations with Kate Mercer—he was casting about for a manner of presentation that would win her sympathy despite the fact that he hadn't always played the game 'accordin' to Hoyle.'

He seated himself in a corner of the library. That arm of his, he was saying to himself, was beginning to burn like fury. The damned hellcat must have thrown acid. Lucky thing he hopped in and kept Agnes from being scorched.

And Agnes, standing by the purple leather portières, was whimpering softly—like a bird. Must be upset. And didn't quite know what it was all about. Better tell her before Kate came back and shot off her face.

"Agnes," he began, "I'd like you to sit down. And stop crying. I've got something to tell you. And I want you to hear me out."

Seemed to be coming around, he reflected, as she ventured a glance at him. "Don't know exactly how to take off," he admitted. "You see, you're so young. And convent bred. And without any knowledge of the world."

Damn that arm. "Besides, what I'm goin' say isn't anything I've talked about before. It's always been sorta between me and the stern sheets.

"And I'm goin' do something I haven't done very often. Goin' tell you the Gospel truth. And believe it or not, that's one of the worst things a fellah can do. But with you—I'll take a chance.

"Tell you why. I want to be friends with you. Sorta ain't had many people in my life I could talk open to, and—And in bein' open with you, Agnes, I want to mention something that's in the air. You sorta feel *Mrs. Mercer* was upset on account o' you." Sure was smart to get over the idea that Kate was a married woman, without saying as much. "And if that's what you thought about *Mrs. Mercer*—you're not far from wrong."

It was a wonder, he was telling himself, that she didn't say anything. No change in her, except that she grew a trifle pinker every minute. Fact was, his whole problem lay in not letting her get too conscious of any one thing. And being that she was so speechless, he'd better have a word on that.

"Now you're sayin' very little, mam. And I don't blame you. You were taken unawares. Probably wouldn't know what to say even if you wanted to. So just go on bein' quiet like. And listen to a sinner tell his story."

If only you would, she silently rejoined, feeling that his lengthy introductions were annoying.

"One thing more, mam. When I get through talkin'—you'll feel like maybe you ought to leave this house." By the manner in which her shoulder shot back, he knew he had stumbled over her thought. "When it comes to goin', just remember one thing. I could lie out of this mess. And say that the woman was crazy, or somethin'. But I won't. And remember, if you go—it's just because I've chosen to tell you the truth."

She could put that in her pipe and smoke it! Course, it wasn't exactly a fair statement of the case. But it had its

purpose. It'd set her to wondering why he wanted her about. And all the while she'd be thinking he'd rolled up a great passion for her. And something like that—well, it wasn't easy for a woman to forget it.

"Now Kate Mercer and I sorta been in love," he confessed. "I say sorta. And that's what I mean—sorta.

"I guess you can't understand that. Guess you're full of girlish dreams, and hopes, and what-not. And love to you, I s'pose, means forever and ever and a day. And far's you're concerned, I hope it'll turn out that way.

"But with a lotta folks I know, it pans out different. Love comes. Then she goes. An' you may as well try and catch her as—as you can bring back the yesterdays.

"Don't mind my gettin' personal for a minute. As I understand it, Agnes, you're a religious-minded girl. You can well believe that sometimes we do things that maybe we hadn't ought. And you're of the faith that believes that if you repent, an' all—why most anythin' can be forgiven. And I want to make it plain that there's more'n one thing I'm sorry for." This, he told himself, was not exactly so. The day would never come when he'd waste his valuable time worrying over what was dead and gone. "And so if God in his mercy," he continued, "can find it in His heart to forgive—you can afford to listen. And maybe you'll learn a little about how things go outside of fairy books. And if I was you, I'd leave the passing of judgment to some one else."

At this point Henry Cullom entered and announced that dinner was ready. "Well we ain't," Thane stated gruffly. The butler left. And Pardway, silently cursing the negro, went on with his story.

"Now all this leads up to just one thing. This woman that was here this afternoon—she an' I sorta fell in love. We—weren't married." He tried to note the effect of this. But Agnes, by now, had placed herself so that he could not see her face. "There were lots o' reasons for that, mam. First place, she was already married. Second

place, I ain't exactly the marryin' kind. Third place, she was more in love with her husband than with me.

"This is a big city, Agnes. Lotta funny people in it. One of 'em's her husband. He sorta put her up to all this. Fact is, that's the way he made his livin'. Wanted me to get hooked up with her. An' then I'd have to pay him a lotta money, or else he'd tell everybody about it. Guess you never ran into blackmail. But the sort of life I lead, well, you run into a lotta things."

How could he imagine, she asked herself, that she would believe such dreadfully vile things? And now that he was speaking so frankly, she'd show him that she wasn't easily fooled. "Mr. Pardway, I—"

"Don't believe it!" he hazarded, noting by her startled eyes that his surmise had been correct. Well, he thought, it wasn't wise to seem to gloat over it. Better say something smart. "Glad you don't believe it, mam. People that're brought up right and proper can't imagine things like that. No decent-minded person would."

Funny, how little a woman she was. Just a wraith of gray. And as for her being human—you could believe it or not.

"Well, Agnes, the long and the short of it is—they tried to shake me down. And I wouldn't stand for it. So there's nothing they wouldn't do to pester the life outa me. And though it's been a thing of the past for years, now Mrs. Mercer's pretendin' I don't see her any more—because of you."

He had expected an indignant protest. But all that Agnes offered was a quiet, sad:

"How could she?"

"That's it, mam. No reason at all. Just any excuse'll do to spite me."

And with that Thane rested his case. For the most part, he told himself, it was true. Of course, there was that one thing—the thing he didn't dare tell her. But like as not,

that'd never come out. Kate would keep that quiet because—

"If there's any point not straight in your mind," he offered, "I'll be glad to explain."

"Why did you ask me down?"

Playing right into his hand, by gum. "When she sorta hinted— Well, I told her that one look at you—and she'd know better. She said she'd looked at you already. I says, 'Kate,' I says, 'don't look at her hot-headed like.' And then I called you. I knew if she really saw you—"

Why, he asked himself, was he trying to get this girl to stay? Was it that he wanted her? No, not exactly—

"Mr. Pardway," she was saying, her fingers twisting one of the red tassels that bordered the Spanish mission table, "I think I'd better leave your house."

He frowned, thinking that the time had come to take the bull by the horns. "Lemme ask you somethin', Agnes. You done anything wrong?"

Her soft eyes darted about, trapped in his constricting gaze. She took a few slow steps to the parlor.

"Just a minute, Agnes."

She turned about, telling herself that now she must look at him. "Is there anything else, Mr. Pardway?"

"Yes," he replied throatily, "there's somethin' else. Answer me this. What're you afraid of?"

He watched her carefully, saw her eyes focus sharply upon him, heard her defiantly insist that there wasn't anything she was afraid of—not anything!

"You're just goin' outa principle!" he declared slyly.

She nodded, and went into the hall.

Then she heard a whine of pain tear out of him. It slithered down her spine. For an instant she thought his heart was crying out at losing her. When she looked around, she saw him rolling up his sleeve. The arm that had knocked the vial to the floor was red and swollen.

She hurried up the stairs, and flew down in a minute with a pack of bandages and a soothing oil.

As he held forth his powerful, hairy arm for her ministrations, he could not help but notice how his flesh affected her. Sort of thrilled her, particularly when he let those muscles ripple. Too bad he couldn't talk her into staying. But if he had to use bare, burned flesh as an argument---

"O, it's so terribly hurt, isn't it?"

"Long's it's not your face," he answered stolidly. He rolled down the sleeve and replaced the stiff cuff. "Thank you, mam."

Agnes drifted into the parlor. She stood at the window. Great drops were ploshing down the pane. The wind, gathering up the streaks of rain, was like a huge broom sweeping the city street.

"I think," she announced with a measure of unhurried determination, "I think that I'll leave to-morrow, if you don't mind."

Didn't want to see her go, he told himself. What's more, had a hunch she wouldn't. But there was only one course open to him.

"Suit yourself," he said indifferently.

CHAPTER IX

'OLD HUTCH'

B. P. HUTCHINSON was born on a farm near Danvers, Massachusetts, in 1828. While in his teens he went to Lynn, and engaged in the manufacture of boots, shoes and leather goods. He prospered, and invested a good part of his ready cash in the shares of the Rutland & Washington Railroad.

In 1859, following a period of financial depression, Hutchinson filed a petition in bankruptcy. Despite the fact that there were a flood of failures at this time, those who had advanced credit to the leather goods manufacturer were surprised at his having to close shop. For though he was only a young man, he had already built up a reputation for shrewdness and careful management.

When asked why he had failed, he would answer laconically, "Times are pretty hard." But to himself he confessed that his troubles were due to Jay Gould's manipulation of Rutland & Washington Common. Hadn't he paid an average of 60 for those shares? And didn't Gould's short-selling carry them down to 10? And when all the weak holders had been frozen out, didn't they rise to 120?

Ah, it was all part of the game. Why bear a grudge? He would have done the same thing, no doubt, had he been able. And like as not, the day would come when he'd do the squeezing, and Jay Gould or some other sucker would have to stand the gaff. As for the time being, there wasn't any use staying in Lynn and watching his creditors have conniption fits. A man named Greeley who sat in an office in New York was advising young men to go West—and it mightn't be a bad idea.

Hutchinson arrived in Chicago when he was thirty-one. Within a few years he had been affiliated with a dozen firms. He had dealt in liquor, real estate, pork and grain.

Not long after he had settled in the Lake City, 'Hutch' paid off his Lynn debts. Furthermore, he rid himself, at no little profit, of his less dignified enterprises, and subsequently established solid financial and social connections.

In the following years he became, much to his annoyance, an esteemed citizen. This was part of the price he had to pay for being a director of the 'Traders' Insurance Company, and one of the promoters of the First National Bank.

After the Chicago Fire in 1871, he started the Corn Exchange Bank in the basement of his Wabash Avenue home. From this time on he came into prominence as a speculator in grain. For the most part he executed his trades himself, owning as he did, a seat upon the Board of Trade. He had acquired this valuable asset for five dollars, having swooped down upon a panicky bankrupt, and completed the deal before the other quite knew what was happening. Which made some people remark, "Huh! Hutchinson! Wonder he doesn't steal the pennies off a dead man's eyes." And 'Hutch,' according to some, wondered why he didn't.

Physically, he was long, lean, rangy. His usual garb was a shapeless, crumpled, gray sack suit, a size too large. He had a way of slowly and purposelessly flapping his arms against his sides as he stood, slouch hat pulled down over his face, under the gallery of The Pit. He was a figure more reminiscent of a derisive scarecrow than anything else.

His face was thin, pale, a little soapy looking. The flabby tip of a long, blue veined nose hung over a scrubby mustache. His weary eyes held a pathetic, meaningless kindness—the eyes of an old ledger clerk who fears that he is going to be discharged, yet tries to believe that come what may, God will provide. It was this surface apathy

that had earned him the sobriquet of 'Old Hutch' before he was forty.

Such was B. P. Hutchinson in 1885, when he was fifty-seven—the man destined to effect, single-handedly, the greatest corner the Chicago Board of Trade has known, to be dubbed "The Napoleon of the Wheat Pit" by headline writers of every paper in the world, to be the one colossal figure, besides Thane Pardway, among those men who flung millions and millions of dollars into the face of Fate—because they could not be proud unless they played God.

It was five o'clock of a July afternoon when B. P. Hutchinson ambled up Pacific Avenue in his disjointed fashion. He wanted to talk to Thane Pardway. And, he told himself, there wasn't much doubt of where 'Big Tha' would be at this hour.

He shambled into the café of the Grand Pacific Hotel, a forlorn, untidy figure who would have drawn a wide eye had he not been B. P. Hutchinson, himself. He glanced about sadly, and gloomily draped himself over the free lunch counter. He was wondering in his lugubrious, parsimonious way, if one of these sporty boys would buy him a drink.

He turned a stary, soapy face upon those to whom Thane was holding forth. Must be actors, or wire-tappers, or something of the sort, he thought. Curious, that a smart man like that had anything to do with such people.

"'Lo Hutch!" Thane called, taking his arms from the shoulders of his companions. He lazily advanced to shake the hand of one of the few wheat traders he held in esteem. "How's tricks?"

"Mealy," the old man mumbled, putting an olive to his wry lips by way of recompense.

"What say we set 'em up?"

"Yes . . . well, I suppose . . ." And shortly Hutchinson's eyes were watering over the smoky fume of Scotch.

"You, er—you know this man Kershaw?" he queried carelessly.

"O, yes, yes." Thane drained his glass. "Yes, I know him . . . slightly."

There now ensued one of those halting, hawing, exchanges; furtive, distrustful, meandering and mumbly—in which neither said anything that could possibly be put into sentences. No two drunken, driveling idiots, jibbering out of a weird dream, could have uttered such seemingly aimless, senseless syllables. And yet, the two shrewdest operators on the Chicago Board of Trade were sounding each other out on an alliance that might involve millions of dollars, months of preparation, and a world of worry.

And all the while, neither professed any understanding of what the other was saying, neither one committed himself, nor did the other seem to care. Hutchinson was playing cat-and-mouse with Pardway. Pardway was playing cat-and-mouse with Hutchinson. And each in turn, seemingly somber, a little sleepy, and somewhat pathetic—was having the time of his life.

At one stage of the game Pardway faltered, that is, to some extent he revealed himself. "Listen here," he said. "You're playin' possum. So'm I. Now if you don't mind my gassin' about myself, I'll let you in on a secret. I'm too smart to think you're a fool."

"Smart?" the old man repeated in a scrappy tenor. "You certainly are. You're a smart man if ever I saw one." His eyes turned inward, as if he were beholding his thoughts. "But I tell you, Tha'. It's as the Bard said. 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.'" And languidly, the brass rail poetaster reached for his chaser.

Hutchinson, student, bibliophile, Shakespearean scholar that he was—sometimes viewed people and events in a bookish vein. But while one of these moods possessed him, he never forgot the matter at hand, and indicated his absorp-

tion in it by fiddling along on a dull phrase. "Smart man, you are Pardway. Smart man, indeed!"

Thane was irritated by this irrelevant tweedling. "Aw—stow it," he growled amiably. "I'll be damned smart if I get mixed up with you, and come out without bein' skinned good and proper."

"You must think I have something in mind, Pardway."

"No, no!" Thane parried cumbersomely. "It's understood that we're just chewin' the fat for fun. What should you have in mind? Are we interested in wheat? Hell, no!"

"Interesting subject, isn't it?" the old fox cackled.

Thane was annoyed at himself. He felt outplayed. "Tell you, Hutch," he said, wondering how he could kill the evening, "I got a date. And this woman I'm trottin' around with me is no waiter." He pulled out a bulky hunting case watch. "Holy smoke! I'm late."

"Sorry, Pardway."

"I feel like hell about it," Pardway insisted. "But I just can't disappoint this one, see? You know how these strawberry blondes are."

Hutchinson smiled a sad, saintly smile. "Happy days," he mumbled, as if in benediction.

As he watched 'Big Tha' swagger out, he told himself that he had put in a good stroke of business.

CHAPTER X

THE CHEMISTRY OF PERSONALITY

SOME day a man may compile a *Dictionary of Excuses*, a guide book to all the mental and emotional self-abuse human beings indulge in. This work should contain, among other things, a romantic definition of *reason*. Perhaps that would help us understand the process of *reason* by which Agnes justified her remaining in Thane Pardway's house, the process by which she concluded that it would be cowardly to leave, the process of outwitting her preservative instincts and all the moralities they gave rise to, the process by which some dormant pagan self—roused by curiosity, and excited by a titillating wonderment as to the secrets life was unfolding, assumed the pilot position and headed for uncharted waters.

And though these mutinous uprisings were inflaming the Thou-Shalt-Not crews of Agnes Weatherly's ship of state, the compass of her conscience was still true to the magnetic pole of her belief. And from the masthead she proudly flew the flag of her unassailable virtue.

There was no hypocrisy in this. It was an organic, a chemic change. The episodes of Kate Mercer's coming and Pardway's revelation had been dissolved into the hitherto clear content of this girl's being. It was entirely natural that they should infuse her thoughts with the hue of passion. That they had not, as yet, affected her outer self, may be likened to the fact that the change to murky colors in a test-tube does not affect the very glass. Before that may happen in any marked degree, the solution must stand a while.

Agnes was only aware of an increasing interest in things

and people. As the whole panorama of the world of the wheat spread before her, and as she became more intimately acquainted with its problems and personalities, the days seemed to stir with numberless fleshlings slaving at thousands of tasks. She was no longer the white shadow of a cloister. She was part of a great universe that went on inside and outside all the walls in Creation.

As her outlook broadened, her insight deepened. This was not so definitely true in regard to Thane Pardway—for he was the power behind her newly motivated consciousness. But with others, a recently developed sensitivity came into play. Now she could feel the icy breath behind Mrs. Brown's few lukewarm phrases that answered to everything, "God helps them as helps themselves" or "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you" and "Time'll tell"—the proprietary remedies of popular philosophy prescribed for all human ills. And the others with whom she associated seemed to be stirring beneath the plaster casts of sepulchral formality. A storehouse of statues was coming to life.

Among these was Madame Cecile from whom Agnes "took voice." Madame had hoped to be a queen of coloratura runs, had reigned in Milan for two seasons, had abdicated in the face of gallery revolt, and since shriveled into one of those mechanically alive mummies of the Might-Have-Been dynasty. Her once smooth soprano had become undramatically shrill and shrieky. And now, in her sixty-seventh year she was preaching the theories of being with the remorseless sourness of one who had been but briefly. She would interrupt her pupils just at the moment they were about to dive down scale from the springboard of High C, and rasp, "Eat more eggs. Throw out your chest. Out! Do you call *that* out?" Like an ancient nag in the pasture she was whinnying at a prancing two-year-old about to run her first race.

And though Agnes began to think of Madame as a tragic romance rather than as a pathetic relic, her insight was not

yet sharp enough to know that she would learn little from her. She, like Emma, dwelt in the small, but glamorous past of Madame's past. And she could see herself standing on a vast stage, her singing soul suspended between the Cs then triumphantly absorbed by the shouts from the stalls.

To this dream Agnes dedicated several hours a day, the gulping of many raw eggs, and much throwing out of them. It was just another instance of the painful, mechanical means by which we hope to materialize our dreams.

Thane Parloway sat in his office, fingering *Vanda's Trade Review*. Hum. Not a bad piece of business. The Professor seemed to have the goods. Said there wasn't much reason for thinking one thing or another about this market. Probably right.

He poked up some of Agnes' recent compositions, compared them with those in *Vanda's Review*. Smart and all right.

Good thing she stayed. Couldn't figure out just why, except—people were like that. Hardest thing in the world for people to change. And then again, to have gone out in the night and rain—None wasn't natural. As for the next morning—Something things look different in the morning. And then, he'd left the house before she got up. Maybe she had started to tell him good-by. But as he'd expected that, and hadn't looked in for three days—

As he was musing in this fashion, Wilkins came in and told him that a Miss Dunne wanted to see him.

"Bring her within a couple minutes," Thane ordered. Then he picked out a desk drawer for a picture that had once adorned the wall and put it up again.

Hum. Coming back, was she? Well, he'd been right. Lanson didn't really care for her. Not his type. Couldn't handle hyper-cats. Only played with that one out of sheer spite, and—

“ ‘Lo, Rosa,” he called amiably. “Haven’t seen you in a dog’s age. Sit down.”

Miss Duveyne had hardly expected to be so well received. She smiled, snuggled into a chair and tilted her head up in what she considered an impish manner. Her large, glassy eyes held an inviting emptiness. “Why haven’t you been to see me, Tha’?” she lisped innocently. “Huh—Tha’?” And she lowered her eyes in presenting her version of sweet shame.

He leaned forward, put his fingers to her corsage, and twiddled the violets. Then, with some effort at keeping his face straight, he recited:

“Roses are red, violets are blue
Sugar is sweet, and so are you.”

Her bosom rested down upon his hand.

Sure were generous, some people were, he reflected. And now she was licking her tongue on those smudgy lips, and gasping a little—just throwing her young life away at him. “Hello, pretty,” he said, smiling his fat, slow smile.

“Are you busy to-night, Tha’?”

Sure could be sweet when she wanted to be! Still, that was her stock in trade. Rub her the wrong way, and—

“Huh—Tha’?”

Why bother with this one? Keep her off till he found out what was up between her and Lamson—then put the skids under her. “Gee, Rosa, I’d like to. But you know how I am. I shinny on my own side. Now you and Frank—”

“I hate him!”

“What’s the matter, Rosie? He ain’t a bad fellah.”

“Why I wouldn’t be his girl for—”

For exactly how much?—he questioned silently.

And then came her, “For anything in the world!”

The hell she wouldn’t! “Frank’s not really a bad fellah,” he repeated, feeling that she, in order to justify

her animosity, would enter into details. "Course, like many a man, he talks a little outa his turn, but—" He frowned forgivingly.

"Double crossed you, didn't he?" Rosa demanded, unwilling to bare her relationship with the man. "And he was your partner, wasn't he? And now he's going to do it again!" Her eyes became brittle. "He and Kershaw and a Cincinnati man are going to spring a bear trap. He told me he'd get you where the hair—" She came and sat on his lap. "To-night, Tha'," she whispered, rubbing her lips against his ear.

"You bet, hon'." He put his arms about her, thinking that this was the last he'd see of her. And the way to get her out of the office was to appear anxious.

There was now enacted one of those jousts of passion in which neither partner is sincere, and each plays his part with some cold-blooded purpose. Because Rosa wanted to see him that night, she was being as playful as a kitten this afternoon. And because he wanted her to go as quickly as possible, and with no misgivings, he was simulating the aspect of intense desire.

In short, when he pressed her to him, she stayed close just long enough for him to want her closer—and then moved away. When he followed, she chose a corner of the room as an avenue of escape—rather than the door. When he had again drawn her onto his lap, and was fumbling at her knee—she leaned back and lay in his arms. When he put his hand over her heart—she sat erect, and managed to expose her knee.

It ended by her hat falling off and rolling on the floor.

When she had gone, seeming to have eluded him, he took her picture down and placed it with the others in his desk.

Any one of 'em could turn up, he reflected. And at a moment's notice she'd shine from the wall like a reigning queen. A hell of a lot more use than old bills in the files!

He left his office, intending to breeze into those haunts of Pit gossip so dear to him, inclined to 'bend the elbow' on a round of bars, to see if he could pick up any information on this reported Lamson-Kershaw affiliation. But an irking, itching desire drove him toward his home.

All through dinner he felt shifty and uneasy. Had a sort of hankering, he confessed to himself, to touch the girl's hand when she passed something. And to poke his foot against hers. And—

"Will you be in to-night?" she asked, merely in order to say something.

"Yah," he replied, riveting his eyes upon her. He wanted to make her uncomfortable, to see her blush. "Yah, there may be somethin' doin' in the wheat pretty soon. I better figger out a coupla things with you." Be darned if he knew what. Anyway, good excuse to get together with her. "Soon's dinner's over, Agnes, you go up and get your charts ready. I'll be up after I've had my cigar."

When she had left the table, he sat there, drinking and smoking. He was wondering what would happen between that girl and himself. Felt something coming on. And yet, what?

After all, the other women he had known were of the "boughten" kind. And that was out of the question with Agnes. The only possible solution was her falling in love with him. And that—

Fact was, it'd be a good thing all around if some young squirt came along and married her. And—well, that wasn't here or there. Right now he'd go up and see what'd come of it if he sorta—

Henry Cullom, in removing the coffee tray, ventured, "You're not playing chess to-night, sir?"

"No, Henry." Playing ducks and drakes, that's what.

The negro had inquired only in order to put his shoulder to the wheel of his master's purpose. "Then you don't mind if I go out, sir?"

Thane shook his large head. "What's more, Mis' Brown can go out, too." Smart nigger, all right.

He went up to the library, and began to read off columns of figures that Agnes was to assort.

In a little while the clatter from below ceased. There was the sound of the back door closing. Then the rustle of Mrs. Brown's taffeta down the front stair.

The stirring August night flapped the heavy curtains and rattled the satin shades. Except for Thane's occasional rumble, the house grew very quiet.

In the course of an hour, Pardway realized, he had hardly taken eyes off her.

Her pallor, heightened by the intense burning of her cheeks—the frightened eyes, once again trapped by his glance—her breeze-blown brown hair—the frail, uncertain hands— All these elements that made up the physical Agnes began to take their toll in the rising temper of Thane Pardway's blood.

He shuddered, recalling the cold fever of Rosa Duveyne's embrace. Hell! He could have been over there! No use wasting time around here— And still, maybe he'd better not—

For minutes, Agnes kept her eyes lowered. And he, too, thinking for the hundredth time that he must hold himself in check, stared down at the rug. And when he was certain she wasn't looking his way— But invariably, at that moment, she was! And his eyes feasted upon her, and their glances would interweave in a curious, self-conscious intensity.

"U. S.," he called, estimating the current wheat crop, "in millions of bushels, 350. Australia, 32." Her head, strained down over the paper, her red suffering cheeks, the eyes that shrank from his, the heaving of her small, pointed bosom—got to be too much for him. "All right!" he growled. "I won't look atcha!" And striding past her, he dropped into the chair against the wall, the chair di-

rectly behind the one in which she sat. Some seven feet of carpet lay in between.

He began rattling off a number of letters to his foreign correspondents, telling them what information he wanted. And then, annoyed by her remorselessly impersonal back, he interspersed his dictation with humorous comments. But it was an unsuccessful attempt to inveigle her. On she wrote, putting down some of his sallies, then crossing them out when she realized they were not meant for transcription.

God damn it! Was she trying to get his goat? If so, his goat had been got! And now, by golly, he'd get her on the jump.

By stretching out his arm he could just reach the Fleur-de-Lys coat of mail. He loved this splendrous armor, he gloated over it, he gloried in it. But at this moment it was only an end to a means.

A sweep of his mighty arm—and it went crashing to the floor.

Agnes jumped up in fright. With a cry, she whirled about to see what had happened.

He noted that her flush of crimson had been swept away by a deathly white. Then he glanced at the fallen steel, and giving praise to all his pagan gods that it had not smashed to bits, he said, "Some people think they ain't goin' turn around."

He advanced toward her.

She backed away.

His hard, glistening eyes fastened upon her. Her lashes flicked nervously. That slow, fat smile spread over his wide mouth. And she, not knowing why, also smiled.

Again he stepped toward her.

And so, he advancing, and she retreating, without a word between them—she had backed into the hall.

Then Thane, to head her off from the stairs, took a double-quick step toward her. Now her shoulders glanced against

the wall. In a moment she could no longer retreat. She had bumped into the clothes rack.

And he, with a single, slow sweeping movement, reached out toward her, took his hat from the rack, slammed it on his head, and marched out the door.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROBLEM OF A GOOD WOMAN

THANE PARDWAY was a rake, a lecher, and a lusty, wenching man. But he was no seducer, no despoiler of innocence. For many a year it had been his boast that he had never had anything to do with a good woman.

Anarchist that he was in the business and social worlds, there were curious streaks of conventionality in him. This phenomenon was a sort of anarchism within anarchism, the outcropping of an ingrained perversity that never allowed him to give himself completely to any one thing.

The marks of his reversion to type were known to him, and the subject of many a self-summary. Over and again he had declared that he would never betray a trust, that he never went back on a friend, that he always dealt 'em from the top of the deck, and that virgins were poison to him.

Analyze these vignettes of conventionality that mottled the basic fabric of the man. Are they not the platform planks that the holy-rollers of popular orthodoxy shout loud and long—but rarely observe? Yes, indeed! How then, do they happen to concern Thane Pardway?

By way of demonstrating his contempt of the herd, by way of wanting to astound even himself, he had adopted these orphaned principles, and made them part and parcel of his every-day relationships.

This will not suffice, however, in explaining his aversion to good women. It must be remembered that he lived in the day of the first urbanity of the Middle West, when the heats of passion for womankind were still being run off on only two tracks, the sawdust trail that led to the altar, and the scarlet path that was known to end in Hell—heats of

passion that did not allow of mixed races between amateurs and professionals. A woman was either good or bad. Good women, Thane was willing to concede, were to be married and corralled in the pasture of domesticity. And the gay Jennys—well, that was a horse of a different color.

Not that he would have told you that scarlet women were necessarily more attractive. In his long acquaintanceship with the gilded halls of vice he had seen quite a bit of the gold leaf peel off. There was, he felt, one essential keynote to this woman business. With the good ones, you belonged to them. The others belonged to you. And that settled it.

Such were his sentiments upon the subject—sentiments which had hitherto gone unchallenged. But now the great leveling Law of Love, which is the primary principle of the physics of passion, was making exhaustive inquiry into this man's attitude on the question of What Woman, And Why? And the test case, brought before the tribunal of his ruling emotions, went by the name of Agnes Weatherly.

Hell and damnation—a good woman!

Had Agnes not backed away from him, had her thin lips not trembled with that stiff, senseless smile which betrays both fear and fascination—he would have swept her into his arms. But as it was, his sense of male superiority had been somewhat satisfied by her smiling, wordless terror, and by a dreamy listlessness that clouded her brown eyes—a dreamy listlessness which made him feel that her own sensuous anticipation was no little part of her dread.

At the moment he became aware of this duality in her—he was no longer in pursuit. It was no way to do business, he told himself. If he touched her now, it would only make an ugly blotch on her dreams. And to-morrow she'd be gone for good and all. No, the thing to do was to go through the paces of the game, grab his hat, and leave her wondering—if not disappointed.

Once outside, Thane considered going to Rosa Duveyne's.

But there wasn't any sense in that, he decided. Only effect she could have on him would be to stir up his feeling for Agnes.

Agnes, Agnes!

He tramped uptown, mulling and fuming about this problem of a good woman, until he halted before The BAZAAR. After stopping to chat with the watchman, as was his wont with those whom Life has relegated to the shadows, he marched into his brother's office.

Thane and Daniel Pardway had a deeply rooted affection for each other. But always, upon meeting, the man who toyed with women and trampled over the world of the wheat, and the one who gave his days and nights and dreams to the building up of a vast mercantile duchy in hob-nailed shoes, pine furniture, and denims—greeted each other sourly, went into long, rambling expositions as to their differences, heckled each other as to the merits of their respective endeavors, and mauled each other with a bludgeoning humor.

After indulging in several rounds of clumsy fencing, in which the worth of Daniel's spouse was a sort of booby-prize, the merchant declared, "We needn't go into that." It was his usual remark after the subject had been exhausted. "You couldn't understand my feelings in a million years."

"Hell I couldn't!" Thane retorted. "'Sides, I got a romance of my own."

"No use botherin' with your romances. Here to-day, and gone to-morrow."

"This one's different, Danny."

"You don't mean to tell me you're seriously in love, Tha'?"

Thane reached down into his pocket, wrapped his fist about the coins he always kept handy for tips, and jingled them. "Seriously? I guess not. Love ain't meant to be serious. Still, she's got me goin'."

"Mind if I ask who it is?"

"My ward."

Daniel raised his eyes. "Hm. Knew no good could come of her stayin' in your house."

"So did I."

"Well, Tha', no use talking about it. You always could take care of yourself. As for her—you never bothered with a woman that was worth worrying over. I guess no matter what happens, it serves her right."

Had a sort of moral tone, this skinny sepulcher had, Thane was telling himself. Acted like whatever happened, he wanted none of it on his conscience. "You're wrong this time," he stated with a deliberateness that he knew would impress his brother. "She's all right."

"Ain't likely."

"I tell you, Dan'l, she is."

"Mebbe. But if she's all right—what she doin' with you?"

Thane smiled. "She just don't know any better."

"How long's she been in your house?"

"Six months."

"And she straight?" Daniel pursed his lips dubiously. "You must think I was born yesterday."

"Believe it or not. And what's more—" Thane launched into a symposium on the situation. As for Agnes—she was as good as gold. And finally, what was he to do? Daniel needn't say marry her. "Marriage—that's not my line."

It was now Daniel's turn to hold forth. He stated, very soberly, that he had never taken offense at his brother's waywardness. Tha' had taken his fun where he found it—and had always been square enough to let good women go by. But on this matter of his ward—"You thinking of going any further with this girl—and not marrying her?"

"Reckon I do."

"What's the matter? Aren't there plenty of women in the world outside of her?"

Thane reckoned there were.

“Well, then—”

“That’s what I come to ask you about, Danny. What d’you think I oughta do?”

“Tha’, would you take my advice if I gave it to you?”

“Guess not.”

“Well,” the owner of The BAZAAR concluded, “that bein’ the case, there’s no use our talking.” His lids snapped decisively. “Just like you! Ask somebody’s advice—a-knowin’ you’d never take it.” He plowed up a heap of merchandise on his desk. “Looka here, Tha’. Want to ask you somethin’. If you never cared for any but a style-woman—how’d you come to take to this one?”

Thane smiled appreciatively. A slow, warm understanding worked its way through him. Darn good question, he was thinking. Sort of cleared matters up. And glancing admiringly at his sharp-faced brother, he replied, “Tell you, Danny. I reckon she’s the only good woman that ever attracted me.”

As he picked up his derby it occurred to him that the answer to all things was pretty simple.

CHAPTER XII

DIVIDENDS ON GOODFELLOWSHIP

THANE PARDWAY was Chicago's prince of good-fellows. In the realms of that Free-masonry of sports, unfortunates, hope-fiends and good-natured fools that are to be found in every large city, he ruled by divine right of countless dinners, drinks, loans and favors of all sorts. There was hardly anything, of material consequence that he would not gladly give.

Through his flinging out largesse with a grandiose, golden palm, he had at his beck and call people and places that were not ordinarily accommodating. Should he happen to be gambling at 'Diamond Joe' Daly's, and run afoul of Lady Luck, he raised the cash necessary to carrying on the game by driving around to a number of his haunts, and borrowing back some of the money he had scattered. In this manner he often collected five thousand dollars in an hour—money, though owing to him, that he was careful to redistribute the next night.

In the many half worlds of the city he was an uncrowned king. Newspapermen and trade journal editors, those eternal ragged-edgers of the Fourth Estate, had often hinted that if ever he wanted anything sent out on the wires—he need only say the word. Thane had always thanked his admirers, called for another round, and prepared to peel another yellowback off his roll.

All through the piled-high strata of the city he had little caches of friendship. Sometimes, on those nights when he tramped up and down the river banks, beholding the monolithic mass of the grain elevators, wondering . . . brooding . . . about the world of the wheat, a wharf rat

would sidle up to him, protectively. Up and down the badlands of the city he would walk, and strong-arm men and occasional policemen would be at his side, asking if he might want anything. "Sure," was his stock reply, "gimme a match." Here and there was a small shop-keeper with whom he had dropped a hundred-dollar bill on Christmas Eve, saying, "Buy somethin' for the kids." And if Herman Schmidt, who kept a low saloon on Halsted Street, had affronted the powers that be by not slicing on the earnings of his back-room bookie—a word to Pardway and the district leader would again be smiling. And should the district leader— Well, that man Pardway, it was known, could pull the strings with Owney McGlory, Senator Kirkland, Judge Brechtenhauer, and a lot of others in high places.

There was the same element of helpful goodfellowship in his dealings with the lesser lights of his own bailiwick. A shabby clerk, who for years had been in the employ of a rival brokerage, would come looking for a job at Thane Pardway & Co. Invariably, the man asked for the head of the firm, it being known that Mr. Pardway never refused any one in need.

"I'd like to give you something," Thane would say, "but we're full-up now. Better stay where you are for a while. Let's see now—" A large bill would change hands. "Try and make this tide you over until after the First of the month. Then let me know how things are."

And though he might pass by the head of an important commission house, growling, "Hello, you bastard!"—should he meet that man's meanest clerk five minutes later, he would extend his hand, invite the fellow to a lunch or a drink, and make him feel, for a moment, that he was a man amongst men.

By and large, his goodfellowship resolved itself into just this: He was always friendly with those who were in no position to compete with him.

. . .

For more than a week after the episode with Agnes, Thane resorted to his cure-all for ruffled feelings—staying away from home. But now he had a twofold purpose in again assuming his mantle as grand master of the drifters who were washed up on the social tides of the city night.

For one thing, he wanted to find out all he could about the Lamson-Kershaw-Harper plans. And for another, he was casting about for a presentable young man who would serve as a playmate for Agnes, a youngster mild enough to accept traces of conventionality, and impulsive enough to get her used to hand holdings, timid sparkings, and all the ins-and-outs of the preliminary by-play of passion.

But his primary concern was with the wheat. In the first place, Hutchinson. What did the old buzzard come traipsing around for? Was he merely the tool of the Lamson-Kershaw people, who might be aiming to take Tha' Pardway to the cleaners? Not likely. At any rate, Old Hem-And-Haw was a banker—and it might be a good thing to sound another banker out on him.

Note then, the first of a series of consultations with George Otis, president of the Chippewa National. Otis was a big man, almost as bulky as Pardway, with straight sandy hair, merry blue eyes, and fiery red cheeks framed in strips of side-whiskers. A descendant of one of the oldest Chicago families, his avowed admiration and friendship for 'Big Tha' did not meet with the unqualified approval of his friends. Why he liked Pardway he did not know. But it was a sincere, mannish sort of affection. He liked him because he liked him.

It was this George Otis, who confessed after luncheon at the Union League, that he had no particular love for Hutchinson, that he would be wary of Greeks bearing gifts, particularly a smart, Yankee Greek like 'Old Hutch.' There was, however, this to be said about it. Hutchinson, through some circumstance involving his Corn Exchange Bank, was on the outs with Kershaw. Tha' knew of Kershaw's connection with the American Exchange

National? Yes? Well, he could take that for what it was worth. Furthermore, he, George Otis, working through the Clearing House and his other sources of information, would see if he couldn't dig a little deeper.

Thane went away very well satisfied. Already, he told himself, his head was buzzing around in a circle. Well, it was like old times. Now the next thing he wanted to do, if possible, was get some inside track on what was going on in the offices of Lamson & Biggers and C. J. Kershaw & Co.

Did he know any one in those firms—who would not be aware of the purpose he was serving? Yep, there was that feeble old fellah at Kershaw's, Claude Saunders. Given him a helping hand more than once. The old man was straight as a rod. Might lay down his life for Thane Pardway, but wouldn't betray Kershaw. So much the better. What could be gotten out of him would be straight.

And that young fellah at Lamson & Biggers. Also had a lot of principle. Nice thing, men with principle. You always knew where they were.

This particular young buck—Swazie. Yep, Glen Swazie. Nice boy. Combed his hair in the middle, and kept it slicked down considerable. Probably came from an all right family—not too poor and not too honest. Tried to fly a little high, the lad did. Bumped into him at Lansing & McGarigle's sometimes. Liked to be taken for a man about town. Not a hell of a lot of a man. And didn't exactly know what part of town to be about. But still, none of that mattered. Did a little floor-trading, and such, for Lamson & Biggers.

Now then. Time and again they had met, and Glen had always shined up with a "How's Mr. Pardway to-day?" Would probably be tickled to death to be taken under Tha' Pardway's wing and be introduced to his ward. And being that she knew something about finance— Um!

Sort of hated to use Agnes that way. But then, she wouldn't have the faintest idea of what was going on.

Neither would he. And here was a way of killing two birds with one stone. Without intending to, she would just naturally draw him out on the market. And Glen, just to show what a smart fellah he was, would shoot off his face. Besides, Agnes ought to know some young people. Keep her mind off her guardian, and get her used to the ways of men—with others doing all the rough work.

Well, Glen Swazie it was. Introduce him to Agnes, and then sit back waiting for developments. Only one element of chance in the scheme. Might fall in love with her, the young squirt. Still, worth the risk. Competition was the life of trade.

Well, sir, the long and the short of it was—Tha' Pardway had made a powerful big investment in being the life of many a party. And now he was going to collect dividends, dividends on goodfellowship.

CHAPTER XIII

PIQUE

GLEN SWAZIE was not precisely as Thane thought him. He came not only from an "all right family"—but one of social and cultural, if not financial distinction. Furthermore, his appearance was not without the suggestion of a lineage, perhaps thinned out, of estimable men and fair women.

He was somewhat above medium height, slim, blond, graceful. A rather waxen skin, and lucid, shy eyes suggested a womanish softness—hardly offset by the flaxy mustache. Patient, polite, well spoken, with the rather threadbare smile of gentility that must make its way in a rude, jostling world—he was not the sort that Pardway would be inclined to make a fair estimate of.

Agnes could not understand her guardian's having arranged her meeting with Swazie. It was a gesture that she ranked along with his other displays of temper—his stamping out of the house at crucial moments, his frank admission of unsavory relationships with this woman or that, his wilful claim to much deeper villainy than even she was ready to believe—all of which acted like so many buckets of cold water dashed on whatever blaze of resentment he had kindled within her.

She had thought, particularly after the incident in the hall, that Pardway was pursuing her. But if that were true—why would he have introduced her to Swazie? Was Pardway merely a demonstrative person who seemed much more intent than he was? She did not know. At any rate, she liked Swazie. He was young and sedate, well-mannered, engaging. Moreover, since she had known

Swazie, Pardway seemed to have removed himself to the background. If he happened to be about when Glen came, he would sometimes inquire, "You young uns going out to-night?" On occasion he would have theater tickets for them. Once he called for them after theater, and took them to a gay restaurant. There he found some one he knew, excused himself, joined the other party, and merely waved to them as they went out.

The more she saw of Glen, the more she thought about Pardway. For Swazie would tell her things about 'Big Tha' that she had not known—his singlehanded raids upon the world of wheat, the scorn and dread he inspired among the conservatives, and a host of weird, fascinating stories of his sudden descents upon The Pit after periods of protracted indifference. Somehow Swazie became the means of her entering into a more intimate appreciation of Pardway's life.

As for his attitude on Glen—that was something she could not discern. "How d'you like that Swazie fellah?" he once asked her.

"I think he's very nice."

Pardway nodded, that almost invariable nod which signified that he had known the answer before asking the question. "Tell me, Agnes. Is Swazie introducing you to other young people?"

"Why, yes, I've met some through him."

"Hm. Thought I'd have to show you around. Know why?"

She mistrusted him when that rich, sensuous smile flushed up his face. However, there seemed to be nothing else to do but explore his trap. "No," she responded, "why?"

"Well, if I was a young fellah. And if I had the good luck to be keepin' company with somebody like you—I'd sure keep her to myself."

"O," she said, "there's nothing like that in his mind."

"Like what?" he insisted, staring at her.

For a moment the sensation of drifting possessed her. And then, telling herself that she must learn to meet these assaults with a show of firmness, she declared, "I think it's mean of you! To challenge me that way!"

"Sorry," he muttered. "Guess I don't know when to quit. Here I go and do something fair enough by introduc'in' you to a nice young fella—and then I sorta spoil it by making a nasty remark."

Almost by way of retribution, the following night he brought Harry Murdock home to dinner. After coffee he took them to theater, and pleading a previous appointment, left before the detection of the nefarious *Jim The Penman*.

In the ensuing weeks, which were enlivened by the visits of the two young men, Agnes Weatherly's mistrust of Pardway waned. So did her feeling of gratitude. Certainly, something had affected his regard for her. What else could account for this lapse of interest? Had Mrs. Mercer or some other woman suddenly recaptured his fancy?

O, what a horrid, distasteful man! His phlegmatic unconcern was more discomfiting than all his persistent staring had been. O, why, why didn't she hate him?

Without recognizing it as such, Agnes adopted the same means of scraping up a friendship with Thane as he was using with her. She utilized the persons of her acquaintance who could not compete with her. The first of these was Madame Cecile.

She had asked the ancient diva to tea, knowing that Pardway would shortly appear. The meeting was curiously revealing. Erminie Cecile, she had thought, was hardly the sort of woman Pardway would like. He might even be nasty or brutal.

But Thane, scenting his ward's fears upon entering, immediately jumped into the saddle of his best behavior. Out of the vast store of his social guises, he selected the stiff, starched phrases of his most formal characterizations.

In ten minutes this man on horseback, impersonating Thane Pardway as Clubman, Grand Vizier of The Pit, and Shining Social Sun, had completely thawed the icy dignity of Madame Cecile. Under his sly, gallant wheedling, Madame became just a Nice Old Lady who tittered blandly over her pupil's vocal endowments, and predicted an engaging future for her. It was more of an honorarium than Agnes had been able to exact by dint of faultless pitch and exaggerated reports of the number of raw eggs she had consumed.

Not long after Thane had put Harry Murdock, his second pawn, into play, Agnes told him that Father Dion would like to call.

"Bring him on," he replied. "Though Christ knows I'm no treat for a religious-minded fellah."

It was an event Agnes dreaded, yet felt herself constrained to bring about. A stirring, rankling urge was activating her. She wanted to see this crude, oppressive personage crumble and lose his surety, become crass and surly before the artful finesse of her friends.

But her vengeful fancies were not rewarded. Father Dion and Pardway liked each other at sight. Thane showed off his treasures, gloating over Agnes' surprise when he spoke authoritatively about brassards, pedieux, halberds and bills. And then he confessed, to the priest's smiling indulgence, "Not that I know anything about 'em, Father. Just what the fellah told me when I bought 'em." And encouraged by the reception of this sally, he began spilling out a smattering of phrases about the Church and medievalism, his concluding comment being, "Don't know anything about that, either. Just what I've read in Rabelais."

And having dominated the session by his arrogance, brashness and good humor, he now slid into a half-sincere humility—the other extreme to which the pendulum of his ego swung back and forth. "Of course," he said, "readin' Rabelais ain't a way to learn anything about the Church.

But then, the ships I sailed on didn't have any Sunday schools." And looking meditatively into space, he seemed to be standing in some childish awe of the man he was.

Father Dion stayed to dinner, and left shortly after—with a check in four figures that Thane insisted upon donating to the parish work.

"A very interesting man, Mr. Pardway," was the priest's comment when he saw Agnes again. "I should think you'd learn a good deal from him."

She did not reply. It was quite true, she reflected, that she was learning a good deal from him—but not so much about him. He was indeed a strange, distant person, who somehow transmuted a warm feeling to her. The very thought of him made her vibrantly uneasy.

Thane was thinking about Agnes Weatherly. Sure was clever, the way he was handling her. Nowadays, if he came into the house and heard her singing, he paid no more attention than if a bird went tweet-tweet. And if she handed him a graph showing the week's prices, he looked at it, made a face, put it in his pocket, and said nothing. At first she had seemed relieved. Then a little curious. But recently, by gum, she almost resented it.

His size-up of the temper Agnes was in happened to be more or less correct, though it had been approximated only by physical signs. She was possessed now of a pale passion—the passion of pique, which has flaming possibilities. This indisposition lent her new proportions. Her eyes assumed a gravid depth, seemed to be developing a probing softness—at once accusing and forgiving. Her brown wavy hair, that had been a decorous glory—now it was a source of solace that went awry under the kneading of her trembling fingers. That firm, prim mouth whose former immobility had lent a certain plaster cast quality to her face—now it moved uncertainly, as if it were about to find meaning.

So she appeared to him, as he sat in his library, watching

her work over his charts. *The Daily News* was spread out on his lap. He had been glancing over it without interest, stealing a peek at her every few minutes. She had been gradually coloring for the last half hour—some rising tide of resentment seemed about to come to the surface.

"Well," he demanded, "why don't you speak your piece?"

For several seconds he heard her constrained breathing. Then, "How did you know I was going to say something?"

"O, when you get to be as old as I am, mam, you sorta know things like that."

"You're right, Mr. Pardway. I was going to say something."

"Yah? What's the matter, Agnes?"

She raised her head, her eyes glancing up at him, soft eyes, eyes drifting in apprehensiveness. "You don't seem interested, any more, in what I'm doing."

"Yah? How do you make that out?" He fell into an old habit of asking another's questions and supplying his own answers. "Do I look at your reports? Yah. Do I go over your graphs? Yah. Do I examine your check-up on the cables? Yah. What more do you want?" Hm. Knew well enough what was bothering her. What's more, he'd tell her so. "I don't have you around here for fun," he declared. "Just because I don't go pattin' you on the head for every lick o' work you do—that doesn't mean I don't pay any attention to it. What you mean is—I don't pay any attention to you!"

"Why, Mr. Pardway!" she exclaimed. "How can you say that?"

"Aw—now ain't that an empty soundin' phrase, mam?"

"It may be hackneyed," she granted tremulously. "But nevertheless, how can you say it?"

He descended to his burly commonplaces. "With my tongue, that's how I say it. Just like I say anything."

She sighed hopelessly.

"And I'll tell you somethin' else. 'Nother reason you're

sore is that your highfalutin' friends didn't make a fool outa me!"

She could find no ready answer. Finally she said, "You become so convinced of things, that it's impossible to alter your opinions."

"Yah? You don't tell me!" And plopping down into a Morris chair, he fell into a frozen fit. For the time being, he told himself, he had her just where he wanted her. And now he'd do a little thinking about the wheat.

Two hours later, when Harry Murdock called, he was still doing "a little thinking about the wheat." And toward midnight, when the young man delivered Agnes to the door—Pardway was still as somber a bulk as Buddha, his head nodding slowly, interminably, his black eyes burning with the fever of his dollar dreams.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GABBLING GHOST

RUMOR is the great gabbling ghost of the world of the wheat. It is eternally in attendance—hovering over the frantic scramble of The Pit; standing in the shadows of the banks and clubs and brokers' offices, even when the day is done; muttering under the rafters of the grain elevators when the night watch changes; creaking and grumbling out of the timbers of the box-cars and barges aburst with the golden grain; gaping and growling out of the minutes of the growers' associations; rumbling out of the angry mortars of the country town mills, belching out of the iron bowels of the great harvesters—wherever wheat is bought, sold, traded, threshed, ground, planted, wished over and dreamed of—there the fearsome specter of "somebody said" holds its mystic sway.

As all roads once led to Rome—so, since the Civil War, all the rivulets of rumor of the far-flung world of the wheat flowed into The Pit of Chicago's Board of Trade. And The Pit, heart and lungs of the great empire of the wheat, revitalized this bloodstream of rumor, and pumped it forth again from pole to pole. It was not strange then, that a virus which had infected the bloodstream, should soon come to the attention of certain persons of power and perspicacity in Chicago.

In short—rumor had it that there was going to be a corner. When, how, and because of what or whom—these factors were still undefined. True, conditions did not seem to favor any such phenomenon. True, there was always some such undertone, a sort of murmur of the heart that those attending physicians of The Pit, the trade analysts

and chartists, put down as a chronic condition. True, no responsible parties were willing to consider this "coming corner"—And yet, somehow the implications persisted, and grew more solemn.

When Vonda had whispered the first warning, Thane had more or less dismissed it. He had heard lots of fellahs cry wolf, he told himself—and still, it was a whelp in the dark, something not exactly to be forgotten. But when 'Old Hutch' had come to him with hints, higgledy-piggledy howsomevers and where-ases, and something that smacked of a proposition—then, he decided, where there was smoke there was fire. B. P. Hutchinson was too old a hand at such matters to be wasting his breath over a nigger that wasn't in the woodpile. More particularly so, as the old buzzard was making it his business to drop into the Palmer House bar at regular intervals and mumble this about Kershaw or that about Lamson.

What was more, two of the men he had sent scouting through the highways and byways of the banking and wheat worlds, had returned with interesting information. There was George Otis, who, sitting in his office at the Chippewa National, said, "Tha', you needn't worry about Hutchinson being on the level. Don't like him myself, but—" And he launched into the details of a long-standing animosity between Hutchinson and Kershaw, which was based on the rivalry of their banks. Furthermore, Hutchinson had gone out of his way to annoy the Kershaw crowd, which included D. W. Irwin, head of Irwin-Green & Co., as well as president of the American Exchange National; Dewar, the American Exchange National's cashier, who was Kershaw's silent partner; P. D. Armour, the packer, a heavy depositor at Irwin's bank; Maurice Rosenfeld, one of the foremost Pit strategists; and Frank Lamson, who had recently been seen with these men. "And that's the thing I can't explain," Otis concluded, "is their taking up with a man like Lamson. But at any rate, this

much I vouch for. Every single one of those fellows has a grudge against Hutchinson."

"What's Armour got against him?"

"Hutch was in the packing business."

George need have said no more, Thane reflected. "Seems to me I'm in the same boat with Hutch," he remarked. "None of those fellahs have any use for me."

"O—I don't know," the banker drawled. "Don't jump to conclusions until you've heard the whole story. Harper is somehow hooked up with our local friends. And you know he's connected with Henry M. Flagler. And Flagler, as I get it, is tied up to Rockefeller and the National City Bank crowd of New York. So mind you now—" Otis frowned and tugged at his whiskers. "You'd better think twice before casting your lot against that combination." He leaned back and chuckled. "I don't wonder Hutch wants partners! The wily old dog!"

"Well," said Thane, "I've had another fellah mosey around. I'll see what he's found out before I make up my mind. S'long." He took his leave, went to his office, and dictated a note to Hamilton Argus, asking him to call.

Hamilton Argus was a tall, sallow man with a high, freckled forehead, a pinkish scalp, and a fringe of faded red hair skirting the back of his celluloid collar. He was a mean, spiteful sort whose very malignity had given him a shrewd insight into the seamy side of most men's lives, for he used his own measly, ill-tempered self as a yard-stick of humanity.

There was, however, in this rancorous soul, a slavish devotion to an ideal. This ideal was Thane Pardway, regarded by Argus as the embodiment of himself, thrown up to heroic proportions. Furthermore, Pardway had befriended him on various occasions—a note endorsed, a loan extended, a mortgage payment met—and all without any seeming purpose. Argus was a slave in the shackles of gratitude, shackles of which he ached to be free, shackles which could only be stricken off by the return of these

many favors. For if he could aid 'Big Tha' by hook or crook, then he would be playing Pardway, and Pardway would be playing Hamilton Argus!

And so this resentful but adoring slave schemed to enmesh his master by an even greater gratuity. His avenues of approach to the Kershaw-Lamson-Irwin group were numerous. As editor of *Hay, Grain & Feed*, the leading trade paper of the produce world, many doors were open to him. And through them he shared some of the secrets of the men who dreamed of forcing a corner upon the Chicago Board of Trade.

In substance, he told Thane that Lamson had been retained by the bull clique as one of their floor-leaders. This choice was made not only because of the man's noteworthy abilities, but because of his widely known, outspoken dislike of Thane Pardway. And Pardway, the clique presumed, would bear the market, as he had always done. Furthermore, it was likely that Orville Albright would be associated with the clique—Orville Albright, broker, rather than speculator, blue-stocking, and pillar of churches, who had for years been nursing an old grudge against Pardway. All this, Argus confessed, he had wheedled out of Biggers, who was his brother-in-law's cousin. In conclusion, Biggers, over whom he held some sort of whip, hinted that the Chicago group was acting for eastern capital—but would make no further statement. If he, Hamilton Argus, could get any more out of the wretch, he'd report to Mr. Pardway.

Thane thanked his scullion, and made his way home. The evidence, it seemed, supported Vonda's first whispered warning, and the grewsome flapping of buzzard's wings in Hutch's hemming and hawing. You had to put two and two together, taking Otis' research into the bonds between that Cincinnati poltrooner and his oil-men friends—plus the data on the local freebooters as gathered by Hamilton Argus. The Cincinnati fellows, no doubt, were at the root of the matter. Through their banking affiliations, they

had probably gotten the Kershaw-Lamson crowd together. Only outsiders could do it. Kershaw, Lamson, Dewar, Rosenfeld, Armour, Irwin, Albright—that bunch of wolves never would run in a pack unless somebody swung a golden lash over 'em. Otherwise they'd be chewing each others' heads off.

And still, as George Otis suggested, he'd better not jump at conclusions. Had to verify it all, and then decide on some line of attack.

What Otis said! And what Argus said! And Rosa Duveyne, and Vonda, and others—

Rumor, the great gabbling ghost of the wheat, went gadding about in Thane Pardway's dreams.

CHAPTER XV

THE EPILEPTIC EGO

IT will seem, to the romantic observer of this history, that Thane Pardway was a schemer, a merciless analyst, a masterly hand at espionage, a reptile who fattened on his friends, a shrewd, reflective social anarchist bent upon debauching women and destroying men. None of these were true. It would hardly have mattered to him, for instance, if Otis and Argus had told him to go to hell. He would have shrugged his shoulders, suggested another round, doubled his deposits at the Chippewa National and indorsed another note for Argus.

All his seemingly calculating moves with Agnes, even, were without much malice of forethought. He might have lazily considered doing this or that, might have brooded over the possible consequences of one thing or another—but in actuality, despite all the evidence to the contrary, he was not guilty of logically piling up cause and effect.

The fact was that this man was possessed of a deep, canny contempt of preclusions and conclusions, of the very idea of the process of reason attempting to inveigh against destiny.

For one thing, his was the unalterable conviction that logic was the tool of the essentially small or mediocre mind. Add to this the swaggering rumble that welled up out of his constantly churning pride, that outspoken arrogance, 'When they made me, see—they bust the mold!' Add to this the absolute necessity for trampling conquest under which others cringed or were crushed, the physical need for triumphant incidents that would feed a frightful hunger for the sense of being, of all the millions in the world, the one supreme self. Add to these a hundred other imperatives that pulsed within him, among them the whipping,

driving desire to be overlord of The Pit—and the sum total of these symptoms indicates a man in the throes of a deadly disease, the deadly disease of egotistic necessity.

Such a malady, in the very nature of things, must be chronic—yet given to acute attacks. To those not skilled in the metabolism of the epileptic ego, the sufferer appears to be unafflicted—unless seen under the spell of one of the recurrent paroxysms. And these seizures, in that the disease is chronic rather than acute, are few and far between.

For the last few years, that monstrous, fitful terror within Thane Pardway had lain dormant. This may be attributed, in the main, to the fact that The Pit had been more or less calm, prices had drifted in the doldrums of fractional movements—the great wide world of the wheat was in harmony with itself.

But now that there were whispers of discord, rumors and significant signs of that mutiny of a few men who want to overthrow the sovereignty of the laws of supply and demand, that mutiny which The Pit calls a corner—now Thane felt the first preliminary palsy of his epileptic ego.

Once more his great barrel chest was a ribbed cavern in which a hungry ogre languished for prey. His body became no more than the haunt of a cunning, masterful, brutal, voracious impulse. Now his swaggering and swash-buckling were only the husks of past performances upon which the sleepily stirring, famished ogre reluctantly fed. An emotional ecstasy, an egoistic exaltation, a rapacious rapture took hold of him. All his animal desires rose up while his altruistic dreams pitched down. The lowest and the highest reaches of him formed into a whirling, swirling waterspout of furious determination, sputtering its contemptuous spume as it raged on toward the Valhalla of the wheat kings.

The monstrous, slumbering, epileptic ego had been aroused. Let the world beware!

. . .

And now Pardway could no longer stand aside passively while Agnes was being courted by his protégés. Once more he began to reach out for her, tentatively swiping at her with the feelers of speech and mood. But it was not any external approach he was trying to effect—there was no staring, no subjecting her to any conversational coarseness merely in order to gloat over her cringing. He was reaching out for some significant perch in her emotional and psychic make-up. His instincts told him to twine his tentacles about her soul.

He became softer, more sympathetic, seemed somewhat ill at ease about his uncouthness. More and more he referred to himself as “an old geezer like me” or “just a man that don’t know any better,” and, “like to talk more handsome, mam—but I guess you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”

There were variations of this mood, reversions to his surging, wrathful self. In one remark he would be arrogant, brash—and she would dislike him. In another, hypercritical of himself—and she would feel sorry for him. In this manner he divided her against herself. At times she found herself taking his part, pleading his cause in the conflict between his crudities and her instinctive revulsion.

At such moments she was suffering the pangs of every self that is rent in twain. And each twain, even, that which disliked him and that which tried to understand him—was subject to a further vivisection. Even when she sympathized with him, she wondered why. And when the possible answers suggested themselves—she refused them, went on searching through her soul for some revelation other than the simple one of sexual stimulation that constantly suggested itself.

But while she was undergoing this series of operations, Thane was exulting. In being brash, and then abasing himself in an egocentric storm of self-criticism—he was experiencing the ecstasy of living many lives, dying many deaths—reveling in a momentary immortality. Such was the

music of mastery, transposed into the major and minor keys of the emotional scale—a turbulent symphony of the epileptic ego sweeping over Agnes, submerging her consciousness of self under the vast consciousness of him, possessing her like a throbbing passion music, the passion music of male mastery.

She would listen to him at times, sinking under the spell of his symphonic speech, her lids feeling heavy as lead, then slowly closing over her burning eyes. Her body became warm and stiff, her joints aching, her skin seeming to sag, while some pleasant but shameful animality gnawed away at her insides—sensations akin to these she experienced while succumbing to the most stirring tonal obsessions of the Theodore Thomas Orchestra.

But despite the bewilderment, humiliation, and glad emotional quickening that Pardway had produced in her, Agnes had not as yet admitted to herself that she was more than passively interested in him. This was to be brought about through a situation that barely concerned either of them, just the sort of stray, extraneous situation that in its very awkwardness and embarrassment becomes a more powerful plea for a man than anything he can say for himself.

Through one of her fellow pupils at the Balatka Academy, a chubby hoyden named Sylvia Winters, Agnes had met a young artist, one Arthur Vaerring. Vaerring had asked her to a forthcoming party. Sylvia would be present, a number of artists and their sweethearts had promised to come, there would be high-jinks. Agnes, lonely as she was, longed to go. In a hesitant manner she told Thane as much.

“Well, you going?” he had asked.

She said she had no escort.

“What about young Swazie? Or Murdock?”

“Oh, I couldn’t ask them to take me.”

“Why not?” he countered, once more bringing her face-to-face with the conventions. It was his method of slowly wearing down her resistance to ideas. She’d be a lot less

balky, he thought, if she could only get it through her head that it wasn't so terrible to go contrary to finishing-school notions.

"I don't know," she was saying, "I just couldn't ask a man to take me. It's not—"

"What?" he demanded. But rather than press her, he changed his approach. "'Scuse me, mam. I just go blunderin' on in my old way. I'm sorry." He seemed to be considering her problem. "I tell you, Agnes. If you'd like to go, and if you wouldn't mind bein' seen with an old fellah—I'd be glad to go to bat for Swazie."

And so they went to the party, with Thane on his best behavior. Agnes, constantly dreading his flaring-up in public, was not only pleased, but proud of him. And as a measure of reward, when she sang the *Habanera* from *Carmen*, she boldly flung him her rose.

But the evening was not a success. The one time he was being all that she might have hoped for, the others were rancorous and loud.

They were a group of people who possessed all the externalities of art, skylight studios, easels, the passwords of the mystic shrine, flowing ties, informalities of speech, garish attitudes, a ribald assertiveness, and that quality of 'artistic temperament' possessed by second rate prima donnas and first rate race horses—everything, in fact, but the intrinsic appreciation of people and places that by some alchemy of personality, becomes art.

They did not like Thane. His placidity, his formality, his humble granting that "we business fellahs only know what we like"—all of which were concessions to Agnes—made him good pickings for a lot of little vultures whose mass pride had gone hungry for months.

Agnes was quite resentful of the manner in which her guardian was being picked to pieces. After two hours of it she suggested that they go. But he, taking her off to a corner, whispered, "Don't worry 'bout me. I ain't agoin' take much more guff."

A little after midnight he proposed that they all come to his home. There would be food and wine. "Food and wine," echoed the carrion crew, and prepared to feast off his leavings.

Thane's first move was to rip Henry Cullom out of bed. And the negro, who was retained for just such occasions, soon had a rare cold buffet spread out, while Thane, running up and down from the cellar, was littering the parlor and library with bottles of Bourbon, champagne, Napoleon brandy, Cabinet Reisling and Pschorrbreau. Then the guests crowded around the buffet, as Henry Cullom, in a hastily donned blue swallow-tail coat, stationed himself behind the platters, took up a large knife, and eyed his master.

"Cut it barbecue!" called Thane.

No one could eat enough or drink enough to satisfy Pardway. He went about like a circus ringmaster, getting one group drinking, another eating, and a third talking about this and that. He seemed to oversee everything that was going on. Vaerring, whose liquor loosened tongue had been loudly rolling about his mouth, now began making advances to Agnes. As she shied away from him, and glanced appealingly at Thane, he came to her rescue. His massive arm encircled Vaerring's shoulders, drew him off into the next room, and set him down before the Millet. And gathering a group about him, Thane began to boast about his treasures.

Now the qualms of the epileptic ego once more set him acquiver. He began to give purpose to the inclination that had led him to play host. He took his butler off to the side, and whispered, "Henry, just lay low. And don't go to bed till I give the word. I may need you for a little strong-arm work." To Agnes he said, "You better go up to your room pretty soon, mam. I guess the ladies'll be leavin' in a little while. And then the fun'll begin."

Several of the women had become quite helpless, and Thane prevailed upon two of the men to take them home.

Vaerring, an etcher name Gillis, and several other men were to remain. Agnes made her farewells. And then, curious as to the outcome of the affair, she placed herself out of sight on the second floor landing.

She could tell by the sounds that swept up to her that the men were drinking heavily, and had begun to quarrel. Thane, it seemed, had set out to prove that Peter Fendi and Millet were great artists—and that those present weren't. And then, after a lull, she heard his booming voice demand, "You drink me under the table? Me? Why you're crazy!" And he ordered Henry Cullom to bring up several more bottles of Napoleon Brandy.

Two hours passed. The quarrelsomeness had dropped out of their voices. At intervals, there came a drunken groan, the whine of Vaerring's disabled assertiveness followed by the spattering effusion of his dislike. Then a period of silence, broken by Thane's monotonous growling.

And finally, a deep rumbling, "Henry! Let's throw the bums out." After several minutes, she saw the negro propel one of the men to the door, shove him over the threshold, and repeat the performance with all but Vaerring and Gillis. Then Thane appeared, slowly lumbering into the hall, swaying from side to side, one fist closed over the collar of Vaerring's coat, the other holding onto the seat of Gillis' pants. So he stood for a moment, blearily contemplating one charge, and then the other—and with a grunt, flung them down the stoop into the dawn. That done, he carefully rubbed his hands, as if cleansing them of such tripe, stonily muttered, "lousy bums," and slammed the door. And slowly swinging about, like a vast block of stone upon a rusty pivot, he demanded of his butler, "Any Bourbon left?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well scout around and bring me up a bottle. And say, Henry. If there's any grouse they didn't murder, you better make me up a sandwich. 'Cause I'm only just started."

Agnes wanted to go down and remonstrate with him. She felt that when he was giving himself over to debauchery, she ought to bring some finer influence to bear upon him. But she did not, for once, attempt to make him practice what she preached—feeling that by now he was in one of those moods in which nothing could be done with him.

Agnes went to her room. And tired as she was, she fell on her knees before the crucifix. And she prayed God for the salvation of Thane Pardway's soul—a soul that he had often contended he did not have.

Most men, having survived a drinking bout such as Thane Pardway had been through, and having won an uphill fight against the prejudices of a desired woman, would gladly have taken themselves off to bed at six in the morning. But no such normal course was possible to him when he was undergoing an attack of elephantiasis of the ego. The very fact that others would have called it a night sent a surge of superiority through him, revitalized his jaded nerves. A warming, flaming feeling of mastery swept over his mind. And by way of adding fuel to the flames, he poured a bottle of whisky into himself. It occurred to him that before he made up his mind as to what was what in the wheat, he'd better look into the Cincinnati situation. And if it happened to be true that Harper had connections in New York and California—he might do some reconnoitering in both those places.

First thing he'd have to do was see his brother. Dan would give him a note to some Cincinnati store owner. Through that man he might get a line on Harper.

George Otis could be counted on to give him an introduction to a Cincinnati banker, preferably one who didn't like Harper or his Fidelity. Judge Brechtenhauer's pal, Carl Gottschalk of the Hamburg-American Loan & Trust, ought to do the same. And Gottschalk's right bower, Johann Pfeister, editor of the *Staats-Journal*, ought to pave the

way with a letter to the German editors in Cincinnati and New York.

Now as to personal matters, wives, mistresses, politics, religion, and the like. Well, he could depend upon Owney McGlory, power behind the throne in Chicago politics, to give him a send-off to the Cincinnati muckety-mucks.

Mollie Florence, reigning queen of the Custom House Place dives, had underworld connections in all the large cities east of the Mississippi. And because of more than one tip on the market, she'd be very willing to clear the path for him where the lights were bright.

Then there was Mrs. Ogden Downers, chief justice of the feminine supreme court of Chicago society. Many a door would open at her knock.

Will Ewing, the most plastered reporter on the *Inter-Ocean* had newspaper friends all over the country. Ewing ought to have a world to say about what went on in Cincinnati, and which one of the boys there would be likely to have the most dirt.

And on top of all that, Thane Pardway & Co. had a couple of friendly connections in the brokerage world here and there. And what's more, there was many a bum in many a New York bar that had held the bottoms up with 'Big Tha'.

Well, there wasn't a thing about that Cincinnati gang he wouldn't know pretty soon. And being that it was near seven o'clock, he'd better get some coffee, and start to hustle.

By three o'clock of that afternoon Thane was aboard a train bound for Cincinnati. And though he stuck his ticket in his hatband, leaned back on the red plush seat of a Pullman Palace Sleeping Car, and snored—

The monstrous epileptic ego had been aroused! Let the world beware!

CHAPTER XVI

WHILE THE CAT'S AWAY

HARRY MURDOCK was a tall, wiry young man, with happy black eyes, a black mustache that cut across his pale, oval face—a pale, oval face overhung with a flow of dark, longish, luxuriant hair. His clothes were eccentrically smart, his manners aloof and gay, his speech sharp and clever—a gay dog of thirty who strained at every leash.

Agnes soon discovered that he was sexually eager. She did not, however, feel unsafe with him. His clumsy, over-anxiousness betrayed him. His eyes would glisten suddenly, his ears go red, he would begin mopping his brow—and she knew it was time to edge away.

She did not particularly like Harry Murdock, but put up with him because she needed companionship, and because he could be rather entertaining up to the point where he felt he had put in a bid for her affections. And at each such climax, she had managed, with no great difficulty, to squirm away.

It happened, however, that Harry Murdock, knowing of Pardway's absence, became more bold. He was, perhaps, not quite sober.

And Agnes, sitting at the piano and singing softly, saw the notes before her go gray and dim, and felt herself falling into a dream.

His hands closed over her shoulders.

"Harry!" she murmured, feeling her back arch up automatically, and a quiver crawl down her spine.

But his fingers only pressed more firmly into her flesh, then slid over her shoulders, and edged in under her arms.

She felt herself freezing, stirred not at all, kept her eyes upon the keyboard. There were the five black notes, the eight white—

"Sweet," he said, his hands now closing over her bosom.

And in a sudden fury she flew about, leaped up and struck him. It was just what she had instinctively tried to keep from doing, somehow feeling that it would only incite him.

In a moment she regretted it.

He stared at her, his eyes grew cunning, he began to grin. She had done just what other girls had done. And other girls, well—many a slap was the Open Sesame to seduction.

He snatched her hand, spun her into his arms, and crushing her against him as she was about to scream, whispered, "The housekeeper'll hear you."

And so, standing there in his cumbrous embrace, she began to sob silently, wretched, furious, heartsore.

There was a queer, scraping interlude. Agnes felt herself slowly released. She looked about, and saw that Mrs. Brown had entered the room.

"Well!" the housekeeper exclaimed. "*Things has come to a pretty pass!*" She turned her salty gaze upon Harry Murdock. "Young man, I'll thank you to leave this house."

Murdock laughed emptily, got into his overshoes, and gravely bowed himself out.

"It wasn't any fault of mine," Agnes whimpered. "I didn't do anything that led him to believe—"

"It's them men," Mrs. Brown agreed. "Nowadays they can't leave a body alone."

Not quite a fortunate expression, Agnes thought. "I'm so glad you came in," she said. It occurred to her, a moment later, that the housekeeper had been peeking.

Nor was Emaline's countenance reassuring. Pale, sharp, slaty, it was now softened by the sensualities she had so immaculately shared. An impersonal gratification glistened about her—a sort of second-hand halo. Here was a picture

that begged to be painted, a picture that might have been called *The Snooper's Reward*.

"I don't think you'd better see him any more, Agnes."

"No, I sha'n't."

Emaline came and sat on the sofa next to her charge, for the first time making a friendly approach. "Mr. Pardway," she dropped confidentially, "told me to keep an eye out for you."

Agnes stirred unhappily. She felt somehow beholden to this frigid, snooppy saint, yet not entirely grateful.

"Mr. Pardway," dripped from Emaline's mealy lips, "is a fine man."

Agnes managed to seem quite numb. "Is he?" she uttered distantly.

"He gave me this for Christmas." The housekeeper dabbed her soapy finger at a diamond sunburst. "Yes, indeed. He's a very fine man, even if I say so myself."

Agnes, unwilling confidant that she was, put in a yes or no as Mrs. Brown went on. A rough jewel, that's what Mr. Pardway was. As for the people he had to his parties—a body couldn't say much for them. "When I was a young girl, you wouldn't 'a' caught me with sech! O, no!" But then, Mr. Pardway was very generous. Outside of the diamond sunburst—

What was more, there was a time when he couldn't have had a word from her, not on his bended knees. However, Mr. Pardway had changed considerably. For the last several years he had been a different man. Nor was this due to any desire for a higher life on his part. O, no! It seemed that she, Emaline Brown, aided and abetted by God, had worked some miraculous transformation.

"Now that Swazie boy," the housekeeper hinted, leaving off in her testimony of missionary work among the heathen, "there's no need to stop seeing him just because Mr. Murdock wasn't nice. When's he calling, Agnes?"

"Saturday."

"That's steady's day," put in Emaline. "Well, well,

Agnes. Who'd 'a' thought it? You havin' two men acallin' in one week." She rose and brushed herself down. "Two men in one week," she repeated. "Well, it never happened until Mr. Pardway left. While the cat's away, the mice'll play."

And with an arch, satisfied smile Emaline Brown swept herself up the stair. The fact was that she had no designs upon the master of the house. She had merely hoped to tease some confidence out of Agnes, some admission of regard for Thane Pardway. And though the girl had expressed nothing of the sort—Emaline felt that the evening had not been wasted. By every sign Agnes was in the toils.

Mrs. Brown's long-winded humbug had added a few more tangled threads to Agnes Weatherly's already snarled emotions. Still unwilling to make any concession to the thought of her responsiveness to Thane, she was even less inclined to concede any rights to the woman who tended his establishment. And yet, it was not because of her own quickening of heart that she hoped to see the housekeeper frustrated. A supposedly impartial sense of justice whispered away at her. Mr. Pardway didn't care for Mrs. Brown. Besides, he was far too forceful a man for the sparse New Englander to hold. She would only be unhappy with him. And moreover, she didn't deserve him. She was only a common woman. While Mr. Pardway—well, at any rate, he was unusual.

To Agnes, bestirred and bewildered by this complex, the coming of Glen Swazie on Saturday evening was a welcomed relief.

He took her out buggy riding. And as they passed by a dark stretch along the Lake, he timidly reached for her hand. Once more she felt herself rather liking him—particularly because he never made her conscious of herself as a woman.

She did not object to his pressing her fingers, but she murmured, "Don't, Glen."

He coughed, and looked away in a self-reproachful manner, saying, "I'm sorry, Agnes. But you have such pretty hands."

"Do you think so, Glen?" She found herself breathless after having said that. She was beginning to feel that she wanted something, something she had yet to experience. She wanted some man to tell her that she was pretty, to hold her hand, to try and kiss her—but not in the manner of Glen's hesitant, cramped style, and not in that mean, selfish haste that Harry Murdock displayed. She wanted to be kissed—not as the beginning of anything, or as the end of anything, but just to be kissed.

She could feel Glen's shoulder seeking hers. Now it settled against her, discreetly. She waited for some other move. But there was none. He was content. She leaned against the buggy seat, listening to the thud of hoofs—like that constant, distant pounding against her consciousness: Thane Pardway, Thane Pardway.

Thane. What a simple name! So beautiful, so powerful. He had told her that it was his mother's family name. Thane. Wasn't there a thane of Cawdor in *Macbeth*? There was something medieval about Thane. The sound of it suggested stone walls, a castle and a moat. And she was held prisoner in the castle of that terribly moving, monstrous man. But she would never give in to him, never! Not—not unless he would be very kind to her.

"A penny," offered Swazie, "for your thoughts."

"I was thinking that it's so nice and cool. And there are so many stars."

And because of that, she told herself, she would have to see Father Dion soon. For two whole days she had not fibbed, or in any way transgressed. But now that she had, all the birds of dark feather would flock together.

And was it sinful to let Glen Swazie lean his head against her? Probably not, because she would never give in to him. Or to any man. But it was needless to think of others. No one could make her feel as Thane did. Yes,

she might as well admit it. He was the only one she could ever give in to. But first she would have to change him. And that would be so hard. For even if she could prevail upon him for a moment, he would become mockingly humble. And that was just as hateful as his swaggering egotism. But it was difficult to dislike him for long. His great round face would melt into a wily smirk, and he would seem like a cunning little boy, half-sorry and half-proud that he had been naughty.

The hoof beats clicked up against a stone pavement, and then ceased. "We're back home," Swazie announced.

"Would you like to come in, Glen? I think Henry might get us some chocolate."

He said it was awfully nice of her, but he would really have to go along. And retaining her hand a little longer than was necessary, he drove on.

Thane wouldn't have held onto her hand, she reflected, going up the stoop. Thane would have made you wish he had, by intimating that he could if he wanted to—but why should he?

When she got into the house she found a number of packages that had just arrived from New York. There were several etchings, a solid silver crucifix, and a recently published, exquisitely bound volume of opera arias.

An accompanying note read:

Give my best to Glen and Harry.

T. P.

CHAPTER XVII

EVANGELISM ON WABASH AVENUE

IF life has any purpose, it is to achieve some sort of balance between the sweep of forces and the impulses of human beings. Out of this coition is born the phenomenon of reform. And it is worth while remarking upon the evidence to the effect that a woman determined to reform a man is slipping from her moral perch. For the fond dream of lifting any individual out of his particular Sodom presupposes that the good angel may first descend into the sink of iniquity in order to haul the sinner out.

That the evangelists rarely succeed in salvaging the sinners, and that the sinners often drag the good folk down into the slime—well, that is simply very sad.

It may also be noted that our saviors are not always evolved through love or pity for their less fortunate brethren. Often the sparks of evangelism are fanned into flames by a hatred of the rival Samaritans. Witness the Mohammedan hatred of the Christian, the Protestant revulsion to the Catholic, the Protestant persecution of the Puritans—quite an ancient, everlasting circus of soul-snatchers, in which each crusader must capture some poor heathen in order to out-smart his competitor, and find a greater grace in the eyes of the Lord.

All of which may shed some light on Agnes Weatherly's sudden determination to join the holy war on the devil in Thane Pardway—her fervid righteousness fired by Ema-line Brown's claims to distinction as an apostle, and flaring up under a gusty dislike of the sour, scrawny snooper who believed that a peek in time saves nine.

When Thane returned from Cincinnati he went directly to his home. And standing on the stoop, he heard Agnes singing. Noiselessly, he turned the key in the latch, sneaked into the hall, and stood listening.

Hers was a clear, small, intact voice. It never spattered and scattered itself like the soprano Roman candles of sound that skyrocket up and break into a thousand brilliant vibrations. It had the swoop of a small bird, the same careening eagerness, the gentle fluttering to earth. It caught up something in Thane, momentarily lifted his heart in its flight, and then let him down in the ensuing silence.

He strode into the parlor, and called, "Hello, Patti!"

She jumped up from the piano, biting her lip. She had almost called him Thane.

"Patti, that was darn good! Gee. I didn't think you could sing like that!"

She smiled shyly. "I got your presents," she said. "They were lovely."

But despite this friendly exchange, he had hardly been in the house two hours before evangelism was rife on Walash Avenue. Dinner being over, he said he wanted to examine her recent summaries. They went up to the library.

"Did you have a good time?" she asked, as he scanned one of the charts.

"Yah, I been on a hell-bender."

"A what?"

"A hell-bender. A rip-snorter. A jag. Guess I must 'a' been frazzled most of the time."

"O." She became fixed and intent, wondering how she could change him.

When he had satisfied himself as to the state of the market, he put her memorandum aside, and smiled. She did not respond. "What's the matter?" he wanted to know. "You seem sorta silent like."

After a moment she inquired, "Would you be offended if I asked you a question?"

"How in Christ's name should I know? Ask me."

"Do you think you ought to use saloon language with me? And do you think it's nice to use the name of the Lord in vain?"

"No, I reckon it ain't so nice."

"And you know better than to say ain't. That night of the party you talked so beautifully about your pictures. Why can't you talk that way all the time?"

"Be switched if I know, Agnes. Guess if I went to church considerable, as you do, why maybe I'd get all holi-fied and sweet."

"I certainly don't think it would hurt you to go to church, Mr. Pardway. Glen Swazie told me that your brother goes to his church. Don't you think you ought to?"

His insolent eyes swept over her. He frowned, and a ripple of scorn set his lips aquiver. "Say, what's ailin' you? You talkin' tongues, or somethin'? I don't hang out with any hymn-singing swine."

"Don't call Glen that!" she exclaimed angrily. "He isn't any such thing."

"He is too!" Thane growled. "And so's that prayin'-on Sunday, foreclosin'-on-Monday brother of mine. Holy jumpin' Jesus, the whole world don't have to be good, does it?"

She hurried out of the room, head stuck up over her shoulder—so that he could not fail to see her heroically indignant profile. As she mounted the stair she heard him say to himself, "Well, this is a nice how-dee-do!"

The next day she was at him again. "Doesn't your heart ever get heavy?" she asked. "I mean when you feel you've done something wrong, and—" She pressed a little fist to her bosom. "O, I don't know how to say it! But you know what I mean."

He nodded, indicating that he had heard, but that he wasn't interested. "Yah," he boomed disdainfully, "my heart gets heavy as Christ's cross. I like it that way."

"Don't you ever think of God?" she persisted. "Not even when you feel all shaken and sore inside?"

He glanced up at her with a glittering peacockery in his eyes—a grandiose worlding registering a mystic vanity and a mundane annoyance. "Now listen here, mam. I'll be sore as Job if you don't stop it. Why is all this fire and brimstone descendin' upon me? Can't you see that I'm reading these reports? And I don't want any Bride o' The Lamb interruptin' me, get me?"

She glared at him. "You talk as if you were intoxicated!"

"I'm sober as Jonah in the belly of the whale," he rejoined. "Now Lord love you, sister. And if you give the word, I'll pin wings on me. But some other time. If you're tryin' to convince me that mine is the path of confusion—then say no more. Because I know it." His face assumed a sanctimonious rigidity, though his eyes were atwinkle. And recalling the revival meeting phrases he had heard, "Sister," he brayed, "black shame on my face if I said anything to hurt your feelings. But I can't see why you should start casting out the sin in me. Not that I mind listening to you, because I suffer all little children to come unto me. And when you talk, Agnes, I hear the angels sing. But for your own sake, I tell you there's no use botherin' with me. Because I am less than the dust," he drawled sonorously, "less than the dust." He picked up a pencil, and prepared to analyze her findings on the export situation.

"Do you think it's nice of you to make fun of me?"

He shook his massive head.

For the thousandth time, she reflected, he was lethargically granting her point without being concerned by it. She was incensed not only because he did not trouble to differ with her, but because of the stolid, lazy fashion in which he disregarded her. His artifice of granting all the counts against him was infuriatingly successful. It made her feel powerless, empty, trivial.

"No," he was muttering. "I ain't so nice. Nothin' I ever did was nice." He was priming himself for a demonstration of his superiority. "Tell you, mam. You can't make people better unless you understand 'em. And what's more, you may as well be good natured about it."

She smiled, realizing that she had been cross.

"You know, Agnes, I've done some pretty interestin' things. Did I ever tell you how I ran away to sea? And how my brother and I swabbed the hell-ships all the way from Boston to Capricorn?" His mind swung back through the years. "We were sailin' on the *Caraccas Maid*. That was a bilge-water crew. And one of 'em promised to l'arn me. And l'arn me he did! Till I came up, see, a marlinspike in each hand—Did I ever tell you?"

She could not help laughing. "Yes, I think you have."

"Well, I ain't told you more'n three or four times, have I?"

"Yes, I think you have."

He grinned. "Well, it's a pretty good story, ain't it?"

"Yes, very good."

"You know, mam, I hardly ever let a chance to tell that story go by."

"Yes, I've noticed that."

Well, enough of this spoofing. Now he'd take this lady parson in hand. And show her which one of 'em could talk turkey to the other. "Listen here, Agnes. What's more important than what a man's done—is what he's goin' do. Now then—"

And so he began the first verbal rehearsal of the magnificent march to Pit mastery he had planned. He dealt with the lives of the Cincinnati freebooters who were likely to be his opponents, the manner in which each got his start, the quirks of individuality that characterized them, the skeletons in their family closets, their personal friendships and enmities. He showed her how he was weaving a web about each of these buccaneers, a web whose strands were made up of the very fabric of life and passion, strands of

human beings who had good cause to dislike those they were about to betray—a wife thrown over for another woman, an old clerk kicked out because of his failing years, a daughter disowned, a shopkeeper mulcted of his savings through the sale of watered stock—veritably, a whole host of unfortunates long past any other hope but revenge. And every strand of these many webs led straight into Thane Pardway's hands.

Now he took count of the Chicago giants who would be involved in the struggle for the world's wheat, of those who would be lined up against him in The Pit, of those who were inclined to follow his leadership. He told her of his business and social relationships with these Pitmen, of how they felt about him, of the interesting episodes in their lives and in the lives of the people they were financially, socially and emotionally linked to.

Finally he came to considerations affecting the very earth. She saw the seed, still unsown in Nebraska. On the wings of his wheat-worldly fancy she skimmed over the stubbly wastes that were to be rich and ripe with the bread weed. And then she envisioned the millions of men who would scan the sky for a sign of rain. And she played tag with the principle that wheat was always being grown somewhere. Into her ears ground the roar of the elevator chutes gorging the Lake barges with the gray grain. And now there rose before her a weird world of the fears, phantoms and insect persecutors of the wheat. And she was possessed by the clawing curse of the cold, and by the awful damnation of the damp, the drought, the ravishing red-dust and the great washout rains!

And shuttling in and out of this story, like the major theme of a symphony, was the Odyssey of one man's passionate purpose. Thane Pardway wanted unrivaled Pit preëminence—no more, no less. Ah, to hear him tell it, the world was but a Heaven high stack of wheat—with him clambering up to his rightful place on top.

The grandfather clock in the hall struck twelve.

Agnes realized that he had been talking without interruption for two hours. She had long since lost consciousness of her indignation at his egotistic insistence and its far flung means to an end. Fascinated and entranced, she had been swept upstream by the irresistible current of his need for mastery. She felt the waves of the world of the wheat washing over her, engulfing her. There was the sensation of being submerged beneath the swishing torrent of his will.

And what of Thane Pardway, who, annoyed by her evangelism, had been stirred by some mighty, egotistic, apostolic fervor, and now held her captive of the cosmic chaos he had portrayed? This artist of the ego, this master builder of great moments, had also forgotten his lesser purpose of quashing her Samaritanism. In stipulating the terms of his conquests to be, he had left her far behind. He now lived completely within the first exaltation of the masterpiece he hoped to make.

For a few minutes she dared not look at him. And when she did, she saw him slumped forward in his favorite Spanish mission chair, his huge arms spread forth on the table, his great round head jutting out of those massive shoulders, his thick lips parted in a gargoylic grin, his glistening black eyes staring straight ahead at his open hands.

Such was the man Agnes Weatherly hoped to change, and to whom she did, in a manner, impart a consciousness of the softer realms of the soul—but not through any agency she had ever dreamed of bringing into play.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOMEBODY ALWAYS WANTS SOMETHING

THOSE two men of large frame, Thane Pardway and B. P. Hutchinson, were possessed of a shrewd understanding of the average mind. They made allowances for it out of a store of respectful disdain, and without trying very hard, were able to outwit it—mainly by the process of giving ‘plenty of rope.’ Theirs was the insistence, not always outspoken, but eternally inferred, that with most men and events they were conqueringly competent—rôles they had instinctively assumed, and so successfully prolonged, that their ascendancy was, after many years, questioned by only a handful of the most powerful operators on the Chicago Board of Trade.

But when “stacked up against each other,” as Thane might put it, these two were temperamentally at variance. Hutchinson was of a critical turn of mind. Even in the tightest situations, he could feel some owl instinct within himself select a far-away perch, and look on at the spectacle in which he was involved with an analytical eye.

This was not true of Thane Pardway. The more fraught the moment, the more he reveled in its fury. He was by far the more emotional, always itching to give vent to a stormy surge, irking to start a stampede, to spend himself in an orgy of physical, spiritual and emotional excess. He often said that he “kinda liked to let off steam.”

The temperamental impulses of these giants marked their ventures in The Pit. Hutchinson was an athlete, Thane a gladiator. Hardly a day passed but ‘Hutch’ was trading, if not for profit, then for pleasure—a distinction difficult to make because even a penny was a profit to him, and every profit a pleasure.

Human vulture of the wheat, he was utterly without pride of position or pickings. He might be a bear at ten in the morning, but by noon would go long thousands of bushels. If a bull movement had spent itself, and he felt that a quarter of a point was still to be snatched up before the bear assault started—down he darted after that quarter of a cent. It was not money alone that motivated him, though he had a great feeling for “sma’ sums, sma’ sums.” No, not alone money, but the vicarious instincts of a vulture, whetted by a scientific shrewdness quick to size up a situation, aided by a philosophic calm that sharpened his senses when other men were losing theirs, and softened by a sly kindliness that made him feel, in a moment of victory, that it was sort of hard on the poor fellows who had lost their money—but it was all for the best if it taught them not to gamble.

Pardway, on the other hand, rarely went into The Pit. In the seventeen years of his Pitmanship he had been involved in only eight deals. For he stood in the shadows of obscurity until some crisis arose, waiting, all the while, for the world to make way for him, to provide the men, the materials, and the chaotic instant in which he could single-handedly seize upon some untoward circumstance, and shape a spectacular victory. And such moments, made out of the conflict of a group of men who were at cross-purposes with Nature’s intent—such moments were slow in the making. But it was worth his languishing for them. For when they came, he could at one stroke, throwing all his gladiator’s strength into the breech, seize upon more spoils than the athlete Hutchinson garnered in years of wrestling. Furthermore, this policy of rare descents upon the arena allowed him long periods of surfeited ease. And lent him a legendary distinction in which he gloried. For he was always looked upon as a dread outsider of whom almost anything was to be expected, while Hutchinson was relegated to that cesspool of passive familiarity which breeds contempt.

By dint of much offish hinting, double-meaning mumblings, and all the musty processes of getting together on a proposition, the athlete and the gladiator came to a loose sort of understanding. This was brought on, in a measure, by Hutchinson's intimation that he knew Pardway had been to Cincinnati, and that it wouldn't be difficult for him to guess why. Thane countered by admitting the point, and adding nothing that might define it. This guarded to-and-fro had helped, in a manner, to tighten the bonds between them. Nevertheless, nothing was put in writing, and neither shared the other's secrets.

Hutchinson was well satisfied with this joining of forces. For years, now, he had been smarting under the familiar contempt of his fellows. An alliance with Pardway, he felt, was just the thing to bring about his own ascendance.

"Tell you," he confided, "I've been aiming for a long while to be king of this wheat crowd." His tired eyes held a meaningless pathos. "And I'll do what's right by the man that fights along with me. Who knows? After I'm gone, you, as my right hand man, may step into my boots."

"Thanks," said Thane, telling himself that he didn't wait for any dead man's shoes.

"Wouldn't say this," Hutchinson went on, "but I know your ambitions don't lay in that line." His bluish lips balanced an addling smile. You big sport, you! It's all fun to you. Just hit one in three years—and then run."

Thane smiled genially. "You bet," he agreed. "Life's too short!"

They made an appointment for another meeting, and Hutchinson went off in fine fettle.

As for Thane, the old man's confession added an amusing footnote to the already complex problem of the supposed corner. So Old Hem-And-Haw wanted to be cock of the roost, eh? Well, so did Harper. And Kershaw. And Lamson. And Rosenfeld. And three dozen others.

And as far as Hutchinson was concerned, he had as much chance as any of 'em—a Chinaman's chance.

Thane, resting back in the largest chair in his house, was thinking that he had put in a good stroke of business. He had at last established a long contemplated line of communication into one of the offices in which plans were being laid for the oncoming corner. He had placed Solomon Einfangle with Maurice Rosenfeld & Co., using Felix Lassmann as intermediary. And that, by golly, was putting a spoke in Rosenfeld's wheel. The next thing he'd like to do was get a little information out of Glen Swazie as to what was going on at Lamson & Biggers. And by the way, as Agnes was upstairs dressing to go out, the boy ought to be along pretty soon.

Swazie was shortly shown in by Henry Cullom.

"How you makin' out?" Thane inquired, referring to the young man's business prospects.

"I think she likes me, Mr. Pardway."

So, that's the way the wind was blowing. The whipper-snapper didn't have an idea in his head outside of Agnes. Sure had scrubbed his cheeks aplenty. Looked awfully party-pretty, the boy did. Huh! Seemed a trifle wary, as if guarding himself against what he wanted to say. Well, make it easy for him.

Thane rose, swaggered over, slapped Swazie on the back, and smiled. And then, fixing him with an encouraging leer, he mumbled, "What's on your mind, son?"

"I think, sir, that some day soon—" Glen hesitated. His flat face was enlivened by a shy, meager smile. "I'm going to have an important question to ask you, Mr. Pardway."

Thane nodded. Well, it wasn't exactly unlooked for. Still, from what he had seen, matters couldn't have gone very far. He'd better take it easy, and find out what was what. "Ain't said anything to her yet, have you?"

"No, sir," Glen replied, assuming a dignified frankness worthy of the occasion. "I haven't said a word. I didn't think it would be right before coming to you."

Thane nodded vigorously. "You betcha! Glad to hear

you talk that way, my boy. Fact is, you might sleep on it for a while. And when you're made up in your mind, give me the high-sign. Then we'll do some serious talkin'. And what's more," he suggested, wanting to be certain that Glen would not sound Agnes out before he could get at her, "what's more, when the time comes I better break it to her. Young girl like that, why the shock of it might—" He could not imagine what the shock of something she had been expecting for months might do. "Well, anyway, nothin' like havin' an older man pop the question for you."

"Would you?" Swazie asked eagerly. "Would you really, Mr. Pardway?" Gosh, he certainly was doing well to get her guardian pleading his cause.

"You betcha!" Thane promised warmly. The boy sure was a dub, he reflected, to hold back when he wanted the girl! Gosh A'mighty! They certainly mixed the milk with water when they fed it to these young fellahs! And funnier than that, the pup looked grateful. Well, he'd have to say something. "You betcha, Glen. You're smart for takin' it easy-like. And I appreciate it." He winked as they heard footsteps on the stair, and with an air of friendly intimacy, put a warning finger to his lips.

"Well, now ain't that a sight for sore eyes?" Pardway demanded as Agnes came into the room. "Ain't that a picture, now?"

Swazie said it was a picture.

"Picture!" Pardway exclaimed. "Why that's a paint-in'! That's a Carpaccio, that's what it is." And seeing that Agnes was only being embarrassed, he desisted, wondering if Carpaccio had done any ladies in wide frills.

After a few impersonal genialities, he took them to the door, hoped they'd have a good time, and said to Swazie, "Stay out late's you like. I know my ward's in good company when she's with you."

"Wonderful man," was Swazie's comment when they were beyond the door, "a truly wonderful man!"

. . .

It was a trifle before midnight when Agnes returned.

"You sleepy?" Thane inquired.

"Why, no."

"Do you mind if we talk?"

"No," she replied, feeling that the evening had been dull, "I'd like to very much."

"Agnes, what do you think about Swazie?"

"He's very nice."

"Yes, I know all that. But I want to know if you really like him. No fooling, now. Really and truly."

She unwrapped the gray dolman from her shoulders, and draped it over the arm of the chair. "I don't know."

"Agnes, I think he's stuck on you."

She wanted to know what made him think so.

He rendered an extravagant account of his interview with Swazie.

"And what did you say?"

"Said all right. Said I wished him luck. Said I'd better break it to you easy-like. That's why I'm tellin' you this."

Glen's second-handed pleading was rather disappointing to Agnes. And this "breaking it easy" she suspected, brought her guardian no little delight. "I'll never marry!" she exclaimed sharply.

"No? Well, what do you know about that?" And seeing her prim lips twitch irritably, he said, "There's no need to take it out on me. Don't bother me none if you don't get married."

Agnes made no reply. And gathering up her wrap, she prepared to leave the room.

"Tell me something," he called. "Why don't you want to get married?"

"I've been making rapid strides in my music, Mr. Pardway. And Madame Cecile has promised that she'll hold a concert for some of us soon. Those of us that seem most promising will be given auditions. Perhaps—perhaps that will lead to an engagement in the opera, or—"

"Well, that bein' true, lemme help you," he proposed. "You stop foolin' around with my charts and devote all your time to studyin'. And I'll get special tutors for you. Or send you to New York. Maybe to Paris, if you want."

Thane Pardway had spoken unselfishly. Always in sympathy with any one struggling for supremacy (in a non-competing field) he was now ready to forego all the delight he took in her presence, all the sensual joys he hoped would eventuate from their ripening association. One of the camaraderie of dreamers, one of those who wanted to assume a more significant stature, had called upon him—and he responded as best he knew.

Agnes discerned none of this. What he had said sounded strangely, coming from him. She suspected some willful chicanery. And moreover, his suggestion was laid out on an unfamiliar design. New York, Paris—all in one sweep? It was too daring, too adventurous a dream. She wanted to stay put, to advance into the world of song by slow degrees.

"Thank you," she whispered sleepily. "But I'd rather not think of it. I'm not ready for that yet. And I have all the time I need for practicing. Anyway, I'd have to talk it over with Madame Cecile."

He nodded, and feeling rather let down, reached for the bottle.

Agnes picked up her dolman. "I'm very tired," she said. "Goodnight."

"G'night," he mumbled, feasting his eyes upon her as she left the room.

Well, he ruminated, somebody always wants something! Hutchinson wanted to be the presiding genius of The Pit. Glen wanted Agnes. Agnes wanted to be an opera singer. And as for himself, he wanted to make Hutch serve his own purpose. And he wanted to give Swazie a good swift kick in the pants. And then, he wanted Agnes.

Well, well, well—What a world of wanters it was!

CHAPTER XIX

THE SOCIAL SWIM

DANIEL PARDWAY'S wife died in December, 1885. The merchant buried her, set a stone upon her grave, and soon forgot her. He had been physically faithful to her in the fifteen years of their union. But he had never loved his wife, nor she him. They had understood each other very well, and their marriage had been marked by a cold amiability which won high esteem.

Thane had been the one bone of contention between them. And now that Abigail had been laid away, the two brothers saw each other much more often.

On one of these occasions, several months after the funeral, Thane remarked, "Dan'l, this ward of mine I've been talkin' to you about. I'd like you to meet her."

"About time. I suppose, Tha', you still insist there's nothing between you?"

Thane took the cigar from his mouth, gazed steadily at his brother, and replied, "That's my story. And once you meet her, you'll stick to it."

"Well, if you say so, Tha'. But I tell you right now, I don't understand it. Unless maybe, she's ugly as sin."

The broker made no reply. This meeting with Agnes was part of an intricate pattern of social interludes he was contemplating. "Tell you, Dan'l, I want to talk to you about another matter. I'll connect the two up later on. Just one thing I ask of you. Keep still while I do the talking."

He cleared his throat, leaned back in a comfortable chair, and stretched out his legs. "Abigail's gone," he began. "And like as not, you'll be takin' up with another woman."

“No, Tha’—”

“Just hold your horses, Dan’l. Now when you start hankerin’ after a woman—”

The gist of Thane’s contention was that his brother, like as not, was human. And after he’d been bored doing his duty by the dead, he probably would like to know a certain sort of woman. “A nice quiet woman, Dan’l. Good looking. Won’t raise any fuss. Got enough sense so you can take her out once in a while without bein’ ashamed if you meet some one you know. Won’t make too many demands on you. As for marriage—There’s no sense to your getting married. You did that once. Besides, you don’t want a stepmother for your children. What you want is just the kind of woman I’ve been tellin’ you about. And I know somebody that fits the picture.”

“Not saying I’m interested,” Daniel yielded cautiously, “but who?”

. . .

Human life is so complex, so variegated, so endlessly interlocked, that one man’s mere inclination to have his brother meet his ward is suggestive of innumerable possibilities. And it would take a thousand pages, perhaps, to analyze, detail and correlate the whole involvement of Thane Pardway’s re-awakened social impulse. To hint at it, sketchily, he felt that he needed a few trusted persons as a nucleus of a social circle which he would constantly expand, a circle composed of men and women who were likely to be of use to him should the corner get under way. Too, he wanted to acquaint Agnes with his world, to have her realize what an important figure he was in the social life of the city, to interest her in people with whom Glen Swazie could not compare. Furthermore, he felt that the time had come when he could capitalize on her association with those two young bloods. Surely they had made her conscious of herself as a desired entity. Surely they had roused her maiden wonderment. Surely they had at-

tempted those shenanigans which would qualify her for—
Hm!

And why didn't she see Harry Murdock any more? Better ask her. But when he did, all he got out of her was: "I never want to see him again!"

He waited for her to unburden herself. But as no explanation was forthcoming, he ventured, "Done anything you don't like?"

"Why—no," she replied, telling herself that this whopper must be reported to Father Dion.

"'Cause if he's done anything to hurt your feelings, Agnes, I'd as soon break his neck as not." He gave this proclamation full theatric pause, and then blustered on, "No ward of mine'll be bothered by any young blatherskite without payin' through the nose. Now you tell me, and—"

"It's nothing!" Agnes insisted. "Do you mind if we don't discuss it?"

"Don't mind anything," he mumbled, deciding that it was wiser not to press the matter. Well, he sort of owed Harry Murdock a debt of gratitude. "Sorry," he said, "guess it's my fault for not bein' careful about the fellahs you meet. And by way of making amends, I'm goin' introduce you to my brother, and a coupla society people, and see to it you get your bearin's in the social swim."

Her mouth softened and her eyes held a gleam of rapture. She was entertaining a childish dream of high places.

And so it happened, some weeks later, that the Pardway brothers, accompanied by Agnes Weatherly and a Miss Elsa Glynn, went to theater, and then to supper.

Elsa Glynn, brought into the world under the less lovely patronymic of Ilska Glienowski, was a type of woman that Thane knew very well, his brother had a passing acquaintance with, and Agnes was totally ignorant of. She looked no more than thirty, bore her statuesque self with a melting, willowy suppleness, and reared a great pompadour of glistening black hair from her high, white forehead.

Agnes, rather shy of Elsa, believing her one of Thane's old flames, addressed most of her remarks to Daniel Pardway.

From the manner in which her guardian had referred to him, Agnes had pictured the merchant as a more bawdy edition of Thane. She was quite surprised at this tall, thin, fair-haired man who spoke so properly, and more than once admonished his brother to "tone down" and "put on the soft pedal."

"I like your brother so much," Agnes told Thane the next day. "He was awfully nice to me, and asked me to drop in and see him if ever I went shopping in The BAZAAR."

Daniel's feeling about Agnes, Thane soon discovered, was no less favorable than her reaction to him. "Darn nice girl, Tha'. I can see that a girl like Agnes'd be safe anywhere. Sorta brings out the best in a man."

Thane's black eyes glistened under his prominent brows. "Sure are a great judge o' men," he grunted.

"Why you don't mean to tell me I'm wrong, Tha'?"

"Not a thing between us, Danny, except a funny feeling that's in the air sometimes. But you wouldn't understand that. You're one of those practical men that doesn't believe what's in the air. You only believe in results. And so far, the results of her bein' my ward is that she's chasin' around with Glen Swazie. You know him—the world's champion he-virgin."

"Nice boy, I think."

Thane eyed his brother with a measured contempt. "You're a great judge of men," he repeated. "Anyway, how'd that Glynn woman strike you?"

Daniel said he'd just as lief strike her.

"Gettin' awful choosy in your old age," Thane remarked. "Guess I'll have to trot out somebody respectable for you. Fact is, I'll give you two choices."

And so Agnes, Glen Swazie, the Pardways, a more drab edition of Elsa Glynn named Dorothy Irwin, and a Mrs.

Alton Beecher were noted among those present at a fashionable rendezvous.

Mrs. Alton Beecher was a rich divorcee whose husband, a member of the Board of Trade, was one of Thane's business friends. She was a vivacious, highly colored blonde, a talking, laughing, dancing, breathless being—whom Agnes did not like because she was "showy."

The next time Thane suggested that the same group be brought together, Agnes asked him to wait a bit. "I've not been feeling so well lately," she said. "I'm rather pale."

"Get yourself some rose petals," he advised. "You know, you spit on 'em, and then rub the color into your cheeks."

"O, no!" she exclaimed, voicing the orthodox attitude of her day, "I couldn't do that. I don't think it's right."

"Looka here," he blustered. "If Henrietta Beecher can afford to be seen in public with her face a little flush—why I guess you can. My Heavens! What a lotta nonsense I get outa the women I go around with!"

She resented being classified as one of the women "I go around with." After a moment she declared, "I'll go just as I am! I'm certain *Glen* won't think my face needs anything." Once more she wondered why Pardway so graciously invited Swazie to these affairs. "And as for Mrs. Beecher—I hope her color pleases you! Perhaps you sent it to her for her birthday!" And in an attempt to simulate Henrietta Beecher's vivacity, she cried choppily, "And you can count on my coming! At any time you say!"

And so Agnes learned the depths, currents, whirlpools and rapids of the social streams of a great city. Now there were parties in which Judge Brechtenhauer, one of the legal lights of Illinois, took part. A handsome old dog, the judge, with his kindly austerity, his pinkish jowls, and the silvery locks that curled down about his suggestive eyes. And then there were his two pals, Carl Gottschalk of the Hamburg-American Loan & Trust, and Johann

Pfeister, the Schiller spouting, debt ridden editor of the *Staats-Journal* who seemed somehow beholden to Gottschalk and the Judge, just as they seemed beholden to Thane.

And George Otis, plump, hulking George Otis of the Chippewa National, eternally atug at the side-whiskers which framed his red, fleshy cheeks. And another banker, Cornelius Allerton Voss, head of the Columbia Trust, blue-stocking, alumnus of Oxford, collector of Florentine polychromes and allegorical needlepoint valances, whose charming young wife once asked Agnes to receive with her.

Now, at every one of Thane's after-theater festivities, some of the men of the wheat world were present. Alton Beecher was in attendance whenever his ex-wife was not. It was he who remarked to Agnes, "I don't see why Tha' and Henrietta don't marry. She's been mad about him for years. Well—". It was a confidence upon which she dwelled until old Moses Hemmingway, street-car magnate and one of the larger customers of Thane Pardway & Co., began to hold forth on her guardian's social attributes.

His social attributes! It needed no Moses Hemmingway to romanticize them. Had she not seen head waiters rush forth to meet him? Wasn't he known to half the cabmen in town? And didn't the theater doormen, ticket takers and managers all brighten up when he entered? Had she ever been in a fashionable restaurant with him but what handsomely dressed men came over to their table, and shimmering women smiled from across the way? And in public, wasn't there a grand courtesy about him? And didn't he pay nearly all the checks? And hadn't he, through his easy grace, good fellowship, and prominence made way for her in the severest circles? Did she not receive invitations, now, from the Chilsons on Lake Avenue and—

Quite suddenly she realized that Glen Swazie's moon-struck eyes had become glassy staring at her. She flicked

her lashes, and smiled demurely. Happily, the other members of the party were dancing.

"Gee!" Glen exclaimed raptly, "gee, but you're beautiful."

After seeing his ward splash about in the social waters for several months, Thane felt that part of his purpose had been accomplished. She no longer arched her brows at the sight of a woman who was slightly rouged. At times he caught a glimpse of her coming out of a ladies' dressing room with one of the women of the party. And he could tell by the flush of her pallid cheeks that she had been enjoying those washroom confidences that once would have shocked her.

"Tell me," he ventured on an evening they spent at home, "what do you think of all this gadding about you've been doing?"

His question recalled certain thoughts that had occurred to her recently. For all his seeming love of display, of glittering places, goodfellowship, and gay company, she had come to feel that he did not really care about these things. He was essentially lonely. The whimsicality of his thick smile, the lethargy of his unamused eyes betrayed that. She had come to think of him as an experimenter in human beings who loved them as a laboratory technician loves white mice.

In a vague, wordless way, she knew that he was committed to his loneliness, that he was always conscious of it. For his egotism isolated him. Yet it was this insistence upon blazing the trail, at times traveling incognito as goodfellowship, that made him the central, magnetic figure of any sphere in which he happened to be. It was that essential loneliness which made him seem detached even when the satellites swarmed about him. It was this peopled loneliness that—

"Well," Pardway was saying, "I asked you something. Do you like all this—"

"It's been nice of you," she replied, "But do you mind if I don't attend so many parties in the future? I don't like to take advantage of the way you make people accept me. And I really don't care for things like that. I wouldn't be missing anything if I didn't go out so often."

"Guess you wouldn't."

His ready agreement displeased her. "It's very surprising to me," she announced. "Here you've been trying to make a place for me in society. And I, without warning, decide not to go on with it—and you don't seem to care."

"Why should I care?" he retorted, moodily surveying his Millet. "It doesn't make any difference to me!"

But it did, he told himself. She had never really been in this social swim. Sort of a fish out of water. And besides, it was making her less sensitive to things, spoiling her. And he didn't want that to happen.

Was he becoming an old rake, he wondered. Funny, for him to treasure innocence!

CHAPTER XX

HUNCH

AGNES had been Thane Pardway's secretary for something like a year and a half before she evolved any conclusion of importance to him. For the last several weeks it had occurred to her that there were fragmentary indications of a shortage. And bolstering her courage with the thought of his recent friendliness, she said, "I don't think there'll be the usual yield toward the last of the year."

His questioning eyes slowly took her in. "I got a hunch you're right, mam. The market's sort of easy, but—" His poutish lips gave way to a meditative frown. "Now I'll tell you. Keep your eyes on nothin' but the wheat. Forget about your long tons of sugar, your bales of cotton, your beef-on-the-hoof, and your barrels of lard. Watch the money market. And in the main, work on the wheat."

"Keep on charting the prices in all the grain markets. Keep on charting the acres under cultivation. Keep right on with your primary movements. But what's equally important is some new stuff I want you to do."

"Now I guess you've heard, Agnes, that figures don't lie. Well, sometimes they do. And from now on, I want figures that lie—as well as the others."

"Tell you why. There may be a corner coming. And if there is, a lot of guff will be printed before and after. I'm only interested in what the trade papers say before. In fact, I intend to furnish 'em with some of it. And what they get from me may not be exactly on the level."

"But Mr. Pardway, they won't print absurd information."

"Well, mam, I've got to have stuff they will print. So everything you do must *look* right."

"How can it?"

"Tell you. Your actual figures'll have to be correct. But the inference to be drawn from 'em—well, that's another story.

"F'r instance, take the State of Minnesota. It ought to be possible to give me one set of figures that shows she's goin' to have a bumper crop. And another that shows she's goin' to the dogs."

But how could she do that, Agnes wanted to know.

"Simple enough, mam. Instead of giving me one résumé, give me two. The first should show the figures from all the counties in Minnesota that're going to the bad. The other should show where the yield is good. That'll put me in a position to do one of three things. I can give out figures to prove everything's terrible. Or everything's all right. Or that it's six of one and half a dozen of the other."

"But you wouldn't deliberately mislead any one, Mr. Pardway?"

"And why wouldn't I?"

"Because it isn't right."

"I often wonder, mam," he confessed solemnly, "if you good people ever learn anything. You ain't learned yet that I never stopped to bother about what's right. And I guess it's too late to start now."

"You speak as if you had no notion of the difference between right and wrong!" she cried in pale exasperation. "Doesn't your conscience tell you?"

"Sure," he agreed, yawning. "All my life, mam, I let my conscience be my guide. And I came out fine. I never did anything I didn't like."

"Well," she said, "if you have *that* sort of conscience!"

"Yah. That's it, mam. You're just like the rest of 'em. You want *your* conscience to be my guide."

"But—"

"But—my eye!" he interposed, suddenly ill-humored.

"If you'd listen more and talk less, you might learn something. Trouble with you is, you're so all-fired worried about me losin' my soul—that you lose your sense. And remember," he added, waving his thick forefinger at her, "when you sit there worrying about how I'm goin' to blazes—I'm losing money. Because you're being paid to do as I say—and not to say as to how I'm s'posed to do." Now that ought to hold her for a while!

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed icily.

"Well, you needn't take it to heart. I just want you to remember that I don't cut any capers that the other fellahs don't work on me. Whole business is dog eat dog. And I ain't any worse than the rest. What's more, I'm a good deal better'n most."

And right now, he told himself, he'd have to be. Had a hunch that these signs of scarcity were foreshadowing an unusual condition. And should that be true, the Harper-Lamson-Kershaw crowd would use it to get their operations under way.

Hm. An idea! Even if this supposed scarcity were unfounded—he might circulate the unfavorable figures Agnes would compile. Wouldn't that serve as a snare to the Harper-Lamson crowd? They'd be anxious to believe anything that'd make their corner seem a natural consequence of a shortage. Ah—the wish would be father to the thought! They couldn't resist it!

Harper and Wiltshire and Kershaw and Lamson were going to have a corner, eh? Well, he had a hunch that maybe they wouldn't.

These days Thane's reputation for rarely commenting on the state of the market was standing him in good stead. Word went around that Pardway was hinting at a scarcity. Men stood up against the bars and asked each other if they had heard the latest. 'Big Tha' saying that he wouldn't be surprised if a strong bull movement got under way. Hm! Well, if he said so, there must be something to it.

It was not long before the inuendoes he had started on their course were being swept down the channels of rumor, and reached into the length and breadth of the world of wheat. The trade papers, the market notes in the dailies, the advices from the growers' and millers' associations, the indications of the chartists, the willy-nilly hedging of the importers and exporters—in each of these and through all their confluent streams—from the head-scratching colloquy of the fence menders on the Nebraska prairies to the mutterings of the men of inscrutable mien who scanned the sky over the Ganges—the whole wide world of the wheat was reflecting one man's wonderment as to whether or not there would be a shortage.

And this one man, knowing no more than the others, shook with a massive glee at having set the world "on its ear." He was enjoying his idea of a good time. Didn't Solomon Einfangle report that Maurice Rosenfeld was having conniption fits? And hadn't Kershaw met him on the site of the new Board of Trade at Jackson and LaSalle, and remarked, "Pardway, I hear you're a bull." To which he had replied, "Don't want to believe all you hear, my boy." And two days later one of his agents in Cincinnati sent back word that Harper and Wiltshire were investigating this supposed shortage. And Hutchinson had come around with his scrappy tweedling and asked if he knew anything about all this nonsense.

"Search me," he responded dreamily.

With what growing wonderment, and what besetting fear Agnes beheld her protector's gloating! Hour by hour a fat, rancid glee oozed out of him. And all for nothing, as far as she could see.

And now, try as she would, she found no approach to him. He seemed to dwell on the heights of a mysterious rapture. Hour after hour he paced the floor, muttering to himself, "Hunch! By golly, I got a hunch!" His black eyes floated in a glistening fever, his face grew gray, and an

occasional grim smirk lent a gargoylish distortion to his stony countenance.

Once, when he was in a more rational mood, she remarked, "It really does seem as though there'll be a shortage. If there is, do you think wheat will rise more than a few cents?"

He threw her an unrevealing stare. "Hard to say," he puffed forth.

"Glen says it will."

Hm. That was interesting. Meant Lamson thought so. Well, no use questioning her. If she tumbled to the fact that he hoped to get a line on Lamson & Biggers through Glen—she'd get honor bright. "Got a hunch he's right, mam." Good stuff. She might tell Glen. Glen'd tell Lamson. Lamson'd think 'Big Tha' had gone bull. Rope—give 'em rope.

"Hunch," she echoed, "you talk so much about your hunches. Do you always depend on them?"

"How's that?" But before she could repeat the question, he replied, "You betcha!"

"Are all you traders like that?"

Hm. Had her going. The girl didn't know what to make of him any more. Giving her rope, too. Better say something to make her feel he was human. "Well, mam, most of the men down to the Board of Trade think they're scientists. They got everythin' so all figured out that nothin' could possibly go wrong. They look down on gamblers like me." His eyes twinkled as he added, "Them's the kind I trim most often."

"How can you talk about wheat as a personal matter?" she demanded. "How dare you juggle it? Don't you realize that this is the staff of life? It isn't for a few men to—"

His eyes fixed upon her.

She became aware of herself as a woman. A throbbing, inexplicable hatred of him possessed her. She wanted to sob, to beat her fists against him. She realized that

she had broken off in the middle of a sentence. But what was it she wanted to say?

His eyes!

And now the soft rumble of his throaty baritone. "Do you know," he was inquiring in measured arrogance, "do you know to whom you're talking? Do you know that all my life I've been a king—a king, without a throne?" An unspeakable contempt enveloped her. A massive frown wrapped itself around her heart. "Do you know that nights I walk up and down the river banks and hear the grain callin' to me? I can hear it stirrin' in the air, whispering, 'Tha' Pardway—be a king!' I hear it in the hoo-hoo of the barges when they blow for the bridge to open. Me! I hear voices callin'."

And now, in this premonitory seizure of the epileptic ego, he became conscious of the sound of his voice, of his staring, of the fact that she could not understand. He rammed his fist against a coat of mail, strode into the parlor, and sat brooding in the dark.

Agnes was thinking that only yesterday she had seen Father Dion. And his sweet patience was a divine window through which she could see the whole lordly peace of the universe. And in that sacred vista hovered the Saints. And the Saints were her stepping stones to the Apostles. And through them she approached the Crucified.

And now, through Thane, she had descended into the hell of the human heart. She was possessed by a vision of the horror chamber of The Pit. There was Thane, a great, greedy, gloating Lucifer, looking on at the chaos he had wreaked, at the sort of abysmal chaos that must have been before Creation.

She realized that the pencil had slipped from her hand, that she was hardly able to breathe, that for half an hour she had accomplished nothing.

Thane's eyes, glistening out of the dark of the parlor, were burning away at her.

She was frightened. For a moment she felt she would scream.

“You tired, mam?”

Something caught in her throat. She could not speak. She shook her head, picked up the pencil, and dizzily rechecked the figures that danced over the page.

Had a hunch, Thane told himself, that something was going to happen to Agnes pretty soon. Sort of too bad. Maybe she deserved better. And still—

“I can’t work if you stare at me,” she said.

CHAPTER XXI

GOD AND THE DEVIL WRESTLE

AGNES was beginning to wonder why Thane never attempted any familiarities. He had so many more opportunities than Glen or Harry. And certainly, in his business and social relationships, he was infinitely more bold than they. Yet he had never come any closer than the opposite side of the table.

Why?

Might the answer be that he used some other means of approach? There was that palpitating qualm of intimacy with which he surrounded her. It brought a shuddering delight that no hand holding or kissing could convey. And at times she felt naked under the seizure of his stripping eyes.

Her imagination was swimming in a stew of shame. She wanted him, just once, to reach for her hand, to kiss her. His hand would be so much stronger than Glen's. And his kiss— She wanted— O, so many things, just once. Just once, and then she could forget. Or always remember. Or—

And why, with all his shrewdness, hadn't he found her out? Or had he? Once, she recalled, they were coming home in a hansom. She had leaned toward him, ever so slightly. She was tired, and he was so strong.

"Better sit up straight," he had said. "Else you'll fall asleep."

And after that she could never lean toward him. Somehow, she felt, he must have guessed her intent—and not cared to take advantage of it. And she was so ashamed. She thought of confessing that she had purposely swayed

against him. But that was impossible. It would be adopting his manner of preying upon one's sympathies by a frank admission of waywardness.

Was his influence upon her so great, she wondered, that she was becoming like him?

Thane, noting that the yellow aura of the gas lamp lent a waxen loveliness to Agnes Weatherly's features, silently chuckled over the recent change in her attitude. For all her dislike of his monkey-business with the various sets of figures, she was taking an added interest in her work. The idea of her charts and summaries actually influencing the course of the market seemed to have made her perk up. Yep, that was it. She could now see herself being of use to him.

He began to think of why he had never availed himself of her nearness. Hand holding and kissing—why they were all right for young fellahs that didn't know any better. But for a man, a real man, who had lived in this world long enough to know his way about—silly! Like putting a dollar in the bank each week, and hoping to have big money at the end of the year. That was all right for some people—but not for Tha' Pardway.

Yep, let the young bucks shoot off steam about how pretty she was, how much they loved her, and how only death would do 'em apart. As for himself, he wasn't going to act like a trained seal.

The sense of an ensuing struggle in the wheat was welling up in him, filling him with an imperious disdain for all the other men who wanted the golden grain, for all the other men who might want this pale woman. A slow quivering, an increasing intensity, an incessant, maddening murmuring took possession of him. His blood ran riot with a feverish urgency. That ravenous ego had been aroused! And it wanted the wheat, the wheat! But the speculative sheep had not yet been snared into the grazing ground of higher prices. So the wolf that gnawed at his vitals could

not yet descend upon the fold. But it gnashed and snarled with a hot, angry impatience. It had to sink its fangs and slake its thirst in something. It was willing, now, to devour whatever was in reach.

Agnes—Agnes was within reach.

No two people can be irresistibly drawn to each other without being somehow alike.

All the great gamut of differences in them to the contrary, there was an element peculiar to Thane Pardway's makeup that had its counterpart in Agnes Weatherly. This temperamental kinship may be regarded as an emotional and spiritual debauchery.

Thane's emotional debauchery was a constant exaltation of his impulse to mastery. Agnes Weatherly's was a perpetual adoration of the Saints. Thane extolled his wolfish voracity. Agnes submerged herself in full devotional sublimation of a Supreme Being. The eternal worlds of Me and Thee were at war through these embroiled evangels.

Up to the time of her meeting with Thane Pardway, the most precious element in Agnes Weatherly's consciousness had been the living, compelling ecstasy of the cardinal principles, the magnificent rituals, the emotion choking music, and the self-immolation of confessional as provided by the Roman Catholic church. Her untarnished thoughts had dwelled in all the rich pageantry of the Passion of the Lord. O goodness of God! O greatness of Christ! O the benevolence of the Fathers! O what sweetness in her soul!

And so the transcendental force of faith reached down to her upon Earth, passed through her like a current, and running on from her, completed its orbit of true believers, and circled back to its Source.

And in gorging herself with all the sweet dreaminess of the spiritual resources of Catholicism, she was like a drunkard drowning unutterable sorrows in an ecstatic wine. For a whole day after her visit to the Cathedral of the Holy Name she lived in the far-reaching world of devotional

fancy and rapture. But she always drank too deeply of the spiritual stream. On the morning after her mind was like a wax works museum, filled with beautiful and terrible effigies of the theosophical and material worlds. In the spectral gallery of her mind she beheld the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the Virgin, of the Apostles—all emanating from the magic lantern of Father Dion's prismatic belief. And on the other side of her mind she envisioned a great swirling globe awave with the wheat. And the horror chamber of The Pit, in which the demons of LaSalle Street scrambled. And Thane Pardway, the lord of evil, swarthy, smug, with his hard, glistening eyes and his luscious grin.

At these moments, beset by the twain of fancy, she found herself drawn to the battle between him and her apostolic righteousness. But in order to cope with him she was forced to adopt some of his methods and mannerisms. For she must carry the fight to him, wage war on his own grounds, use a similar armament!

So she stood before the mirror for hours, practicing a stare, an abrupt gesture, an intimidating glower, an impressive entrance, an angry exit. Then she would rehash a list of questions to be put to him, canny questions to which there could be but one answer, canny questions such as he so often asked her. And then, lying in wait for some provocation, she prepared to launch the assault.

Each of these little dramas failed on its opening night. The script had to be forgotten, and the props sent back to the storehouse of Pathetic Little Schemes.

For Thane Pardway was a poor audience. He had seen many a tempest in a teapot. He knew how it started. He knew when it would end. And infinitely more able actor-manager that he was, he sat through the show politely and unmovingly, dreaming his own dreams.

At times, in an attempt to enter into the illusion of success, she would belabor him for some comment. "Tell me," she would demand, "doesn't that prove I'm right?"

His slow smile would suggest a vague, kindly bemusement. And he would answer, "There's no sense to your tryin' to act like me, mam."

It was just another instance of how he made her feel so futile, so insignificant. "I ought to hate you," she once said.

"Yah," he responded indifferently, "I guess you ought."

But she found it impossible to dislike him. She had come to understand how necessary his arrogance was to him, how empty his life would be without it. Furthermore, she felt that he could not help being what he was. His many soliloquies about himself had made her appreciative of the probable hereditary and environmental influences that had shaped him. And she was forced to concede that the few likeable things in him had been developed by virtue of his harsh, driving, domineering will.

No, she admitted to herself, it was no longer Thane Pardway's attitudes she resented—but her own. Why didn't she hate him? Why could she condone in him what was unforgivable in others? Was she to believe that he had bewitched her? O terrible, enthralling thought—this being bewitched!

And so Agnes Weatherly's heavenly preoccupations came to grips with the hellish aspects of the wax works museum of her mind. The dead maiden soul of a woman who found herself face to face with love and lust was wandering about in a purgatory that spanned the highest and lowest reaches of her consciousness—going from the infernal machinations of Thane Pardway to the great goodness of God—and falling again into the clutches of Thane.

It is perhaps unfortunate that all orthodox concepts of God are harnessed to the Devil by an endless human chain. And that in the darkness of our inner lives these two mighty antagonists are eternally embroiled. And that neither of them (ever since the passing of certain Jewish gentlemen with whom they were wont to hold converse) makes any outcry. And that as they wrestle and scuffle for

our souls, we hear only the clanking of the bounden chain.

“Do—don’t!” clanks the human chain, “do—don’t!”

And God and the Devil wrestle on in the enveloping agony of human life.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SEDUCTION OF AGNES

THE wind had welded all the sounds of the city into an autumnal dirge. Through the fluted columns of the irregular streets, as if through the pipes of some colossal organ, swelled the reverberant oratorio of stormy skies, the swishing cacaphony of an angry sea, and the sullen blare of hurly-burly Chicago on its Saturday night. There was the rasp of the whirling leaves at the window panes, the click-clack of horses' hoofs on wet pavements, the elegant whir of carriage wheels, the piercing caw of the river boats, the groaning of street-carrettes—all drenched in the pattering insistence of a cold, brusk rain.

Within Thane Pardway's redoubtable walls, three persons once-removed from the storm were being stirred by the benumbing wonderment the elements evoke. They held their hands out to the bluish flame of the evenly banked coals, and tried to temper their thoughts to their tasks. No one of them succeeded. Their hands were warm, their hearts were chill. And the song of a glorious, ancient blusterer sang on in their heads. The bugle blasts of autumn were proclaiming the empirical assaults of winter, winter with all its hoary heraldry of frost and sleet and ice and snow, winter was making its magical descent upon the soul.

Agnes Weatherly, Thane Pardway and Henry Cullom were the three at their tasks—Emaline Brown enjoying the questionable privilege of having this night off. Agnes was working upon a problem in the wheat to which Pardway had demanded statistical solution. Henry Cullom was serving as chess foil. And Thane, in an arduous at-

tempt to amuse himself, was agonizing over a helpless queen.

And then, beaten by the lugubrious, disinterested black man, he said, "Henry, I'll tell you. You go up and make me a fire in my room. And then you can go out, see? Out for the night."

The butler silently replaced the ivory chessmen in their velvet case, folded up the bejeweled board, and left the room.

Thane, standing at the bay window, swept the purple hangings aside, and moodily surveyed the lamplit scene. "Not raining any more," he announced. "Hear that? Guess it's turned to hail."

Agnes, working on in the next room, felt her heart grow cold.

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Henry Cullom had left the house.

Thane, after much gloomy preoccupation with nothing in particular, stopped mumbling to himself, and strode into the library. At first he paced up and down. And then he began to circle round and about Agnes, not uttering a sound.

Well, he observed, she was breathing a little faster. Her lips were trembling like pale, fluttering petals. And her soft eyes had begun to glisten.

"Huh!" he exclaimed softly.

She put the pencil aside. Her trembling, open lips sought steadiness in compression. "Did you say anything, Mr. Pardway?"

"Yeh," he replied, sniggering, "I said—huh!"

A quickening uneasiness possessed her. She remembered that he had wanted a fire in his room. Of course, it was cold. But that didn't quite account for it. And Mrs. Brown gone. And Henry. And him stamping around so, making the shade of the gas mantle shake. And a peculiar stony sureness about him. The shade of the mantle, and her hand, and her heart—all shook.

And showing a frozen smile, she ventured, "Do you want anything, Mr. Pardway?"

He slowly shook his head.

"O—all right, then." And she set to work.

Didn't have her mind on what she was doing, he reflected. Just trying to keep busy to avoid him.

Now he lolled back, smiling his thick, lush smile. His insistent eyes burned away at her. He coiled his arms back of his head, and wound one leg about the other. He was altogether like a big, fat boa-constrictor terrorizing a frightened bird.

Her very fear made her prey to him. It was a crushing emotion that slowly forced her back into herself, a constantly more oppressive consciousness from which there was no escape. She was stricken by the fascination of her own fright.

She flung her pencil to the floor, crying, "I can't, I can't!"

He rose, recovered the pencil, and with mock decorousness, placed it by her hand. For a minute or two he remained at her side, looking down at her wavy brown hair, at those glowing cheeks, at her pink bosom.

Her face turned up to him. Her glassy eyes had lost their remorse. A hopeless adoration shone up to him. And as if denying her agitation, she kept on shaking her head . . . slowly shaking her head. . . .

"You love me, mam," he said.

Shaking her head . . . slowly . . . shaking her head . . .

He resumed his pacing. "You know," he mumbled, "I'm no marryin' man. Still, don't matter. Always get what I want." Silence. "Want you. Get you, too." More pacing, around and around . . . and around and around her. "Hard on you, mam. I'm sorta sorry." No sound but the pelting rain at the windows. "Maybe I'm not sorry. Don't know. Still—"

She hardly heard. Now she felt his strong warm hand on her throat, with the ravishing fingers feeling at her

flesh. And the dull, distant monotony of his voice, "I could crush you—"

O, the chill agony of her heart!

"I could—"

O, the throbbing passion of her close held throat! "You're crazy," she heard herself saying,, "you're—"

An uncaring agreement oozed out of his gruff voice.

"Sure. Cra-a-zy."

She was overcome by a flood of slimy, crawly feelings. There was a sickening delight in his encroaching desire. There was a terror, an inexplicable fascination in her own helplessness."

"Holy Mary!" she whispered, shrinking away.

And he, seeing her succumb, was moved by a strange compassion. Poor little thing, he thought, she didn't have a chance, not a Chinaman's chance.

His voice. "You better go, mam, while the goin's good. You stay here another coupla minutes, and—"

What Almighty mercy, she wondered, had entered into his soul? And she sat, stricken and congealed, attempting to unravel this mysterious benevolence.

It remained unraveled.

Only the life history of this man could afford an explanation—and Agnes was searching in amongst the stars.

It did not occur to her that he had a great longing to be loved. In his dozens of affairs there had been many women passionately eager for him—but none, he felt, who had loved him. With one it was his money, with another his vibrant physical attractiveness, with a third his renowned goodfellowship— But never love. And in his loneliness, and in his massive arrogance, lay the roots of his love hunger. All sorts of women adored all manner of men. But he, he had to buy 'em, or— But love? No. No one had ever loved him.

He had come to realize, recently, that it was not possible for any of those women to have loved him. They had been a worldly lot, not necessarily craven, but still, too knowing

to let themselves slip into a deep emotion with a man whose passions were so self-centered. Ah, they understood him too well. Only incarnate innocence could really care for him. Only a sacrificial self could bear with him. And so Agnes had become the one prospect of his need to be loved—his need to be loved which was so essentially part of his egotistic arrogance.

But was it out of any reverence for her that he suggested her immediate flight? No. He had felt, somehow, that she would not go. But he wanted verification. He wanted not only her love, but proof that it was so strong—that it would not retreat even under his urging.

“Well?” he demanded, drinking in her glistening eyes, sopping up the pallid face stamped with a serene dread, “well, you goin’?”

He might as well have called upon the coals to leap out of the flames.

Wasn’t she trying, with all her pothering might, to elude him? And at every twist and turn, in an effort to work herself out of the web he had spun about her, wasn’t she merely becoming more deeply enmeshed?

And of what avail that she told herself for the thousandth time that he was brutal, inhuman, fascinatingly monstrous? It merely confirmed her love of him, it merely unleashed the unholy lust that laved away at her.

O for those obliterating arms about her! O that he might tear her, trample upon her, destroy her even unto the consciousness of the wrong, the wrong!

And sick with the slavishness of her devotion, she whispered helplessly, “I love you, Thane. Do anything you like—with me.”

He was permeated with a vague, musing pathos. He felt that Agnes had somehow turned the tables upon him. Now it was she—who was doing the seducing. Ah, she, so pale, so fragile, so flower-like—even she was in the toils of passion!

He was rather sorry about it. Some of the illusion of her

innocence had been dispelled. And still, his pity merely made him the more cognizant of his power over her.

"Come," he said.

But she only shrank down in the chair, and covered her face with her hands.

For a moment he listened to her sobbing. And then, placing his arms about her, he carried her up to his room.

There was no other light but the red glow of the coals.

Thane placed Agnes on the bed. She lay prone, unstirring, and for the moment, uncaring. To her, the sin had been consummated by her submission.

She wondered, after a few minutes, why he hadn't put a match to the chandelier. And then she was grateful. At least he had left her the dark.

He poked the grate, muttering, "Agnes, Agnes."

There was no answer. He looked out onto the street. Hm. Must be after midnight. And it had begun to snow. Well—still no signs of life from Agnes. And her eyes closed. And not a sound. Didn't matter. Nothing to talk about anyhow.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, and began to stroke her arm. After a while her hand trembled against his. Their fingers interlocked.

Well, he mused, thank God for small favors—he still had another hand.

His free fingers felt over her throat. And ventured over a small, quivering breast—and rested, hedged in by her corset.

Doing about as well as a one-armed porch-climber, he reflected.

The grandfather clock in the hall chimed forth a single stroke.

Agnes opened her eyes. "One o'clock," she said.

Pardway bent over her, took her face in his hands, and kissed her. For a moment he could feel her convulsive shrinking. And then, slowly, she snuggled up to him.

And now he sneaked a sidelong glance at her. She was aglisten with the sullen, reddish glow of the flames. His eyes lingered upon her rippling throat. And upon her flame-wrapped face. And for him she was the fire woman, the enchanting embodiment of all dancing flames.

His head fell upon hers, and his lips pressed down upon her slumbrous eyes.

She stirred, and tucking up the quilt, murmured, "It's cold."

"Yah," he agreed, "it's cold."

And she, looking away from him, sank her gaze into the flames. "Hear the wind in the chimney," she said. "And Tha'—it's scattering ashes all over the rug."

How could she think of the rug, he wondered. And then, remembering his flippant reflections of the first moments of this intimacy, he understood. And wondered anew that our minds are so stepped in commonplaces that they dwell upon them—even at such moments as this.

The smothering of the close, enveloping silence. And then her only utterance—a hysterical giggle.

And soon, with a mingled disgust and delight tempering his heavy lethargy, he fell asleep.

The clock struck three.

Agnes, feeling the pain of her wide open eyes, realized that she had been staring at the ceiling ever since he had begun to snore. O, how could he, how could he? And then, in a caress of infinite tenderness, she swept her hand over his great body.

Then she collected her scrambled clothes, and fled down the hall to her room.

Why she locked the door was something she never could understand.

CHAPTER XXIII

COMPLICATIONS

IN November, 1886, the pages of *Vonda's Review* and *Hay, Grain & Feed* reeked of dour calumny. So did the syndicated columns of market chatter compiled by 'Silent' Tompkins, a feature that appeared in the financial sections of some twenty papers. Nor were these alarming notices without reason. Each expression of opinion, seemingly, was supported by sets of figures—figures incomplete, to be sure, but unassailably correct.

What shrewd observers of wheat conditions made of this supposed shortage has not been recorded. In one office in Chicago, however, a ponderous man slowly stalked up and down, rubbing his hands with an air of brooding exuberance.

Behold his perturbation, however, when *McKillip's Weekly*, an organ devoted to Lamson and Orville Albright, joined the calamity howling. Was L. Jason McKillip merely riding the crest of the wave, Pardway wondered. Or did the Lamson-Albright-McKillip crowd have any information that indicated beyond a shadow of a doubt that 1887 would see a shortage?

The whole darn thing, he told himself, was a perplexing problem. Here he was, working practically in the dark, in a game where foretelling meant everything. And the stakes were greater than any he had ever played for. No question of it, if this thing came to a head, Pit leadership would be in the hands of the victors. Either Kershaw and Lamson would run the market, or Hutch and himself—with a further probability that if he and Hutch emerged triumphant, one would have to do away with the other. And

the king-pin of the lot would be the man who knew the real truth of things months before the others. Well, well! It certainly was a pretty mess—with the complications increasingly snarled by the sad forecast in *McKillip's Weekly*.

First thing he'd have to do was send a number of wires to Cincinnati. Hell, he wasn't paying those men for fun. It was up to them to find out if Harper and Wiltshire really believed this scare. And those two would have a yes or no idea about it.

And furthermore, after communicating with his Cincinnati agents, he'd have to start trailing this local bunch. Let's see, now. Kate Mercer was a first rate—Nope, that wouldn't do. But what about Rosa Duveyne? Rosa probably hadn't forgiven him for ditching her. But still—

It was a challenging, wheedling notion, this business of getting his former mistress to join the espionage corps. It appealed to his sense of masterfulness, to his instinctive love of turning the tables on people.

Not twenty-four hours had passed but what Rosa Duveyne was coyly snuggling against the marquetry desk in the principal office of Thane Pardway & Co.

"Rosa, I'm goin' do something I've never done with you," he promised. "I'm goin' be dead on the level. Now I don't care for you worth a tinker's damn—"

She laughed outright.

"Glad to see you take it sensible-like," he said, and smiled. And taking her hand in a friendly manner, he continued, "All I want of you is a little work I'll be glad to pay for. Name your own figure when the job's done."

He went on to describe Orville Albright, a very rich, circumspet man, prominent in Chicago society, and not to be disregarded in The Pit. "And what I want, Rosa, is some idea of what Albright's thinkin' about. You ought to be able to get it easy. That sepulcher has been too whited all his life. He's sure to change colors if you give him a chance. And any pretties you get outa him—" He shrugged. "Why, of course, that's yours. And whether or

not he tells you anythin' I want to know, I'll pay you whatever you say."

It was the sort of project to which she would readily agree—and did.

"Just one more thing," he remarked as she was about to leave. "I know you and Lamson aren't friends any more. And I'm counting on you not to repeat a word of this."

"Why Tha'—"

"None of that!" he called sharply. "I trust you. I *have* to. And that's where I figure you'll be straight with me. Lamson wouldn't 'a' trusted you."

And with that reminder he sent her on her way.

In a day or two, he decided, he'd get Elsa Glynn over. Elsa hadn't made out so well with Daniel. And he owed her something. Her sister, Selena— Well, anyway—she might make out with Lamson. Didn't care much for this snooping business. But there was no way out of it. Simply had to know what was going on within the clique.

In a pleasant, busy, pre-occupied frame of mind, he started for home.

Good thing, he reflected as he marched down Wabash Avenue, that he'd gotten rid of Emaline Brown in a convenient way. This idea of having her spend part of her time at Daniel's was working out. Particularly, as she did her sleeping there. And when Henry had a night off—Hm!

Had to do it for Aggy's sake. Made her feel a lot better about it. And these days, with Abigail gone, Daniel needed a good housekeeper. Mrs. Brown could do the marketing in the morning, and go over to Danny's for the afternoon and evening. And it was all right with her—she had more money in her purse at the end of the month.

And musing in this fashion, he entered his house, and beheld an unhappy Agnes.

"Why, what's the matter, Aggy?"

She turned away from him. "O—nothing."

"Look here," he said, "this isn't nothing. You were perfectly all right when I left this morning. And now, out of a clear sky—" He came up to her and put his hands on her shoulders. "Aggy—"

"Aggy!" she murmured scornfully, and tearfully floundered onto the sofa.

He threw his hands up and stamped about the room with a "Jesus! These women!"

After several minutes she said, "Mrs. Mercer was here to-day."

So that was it! Kate must have told her. Nothing else could have upset her so. And still, at the rate he was paying Kate, she might have kept her mouth shut. Maybe she had, maybe it was something else. "Well," he insisted, "out with it!"

"O—you know," she moaned, "you know."

No use trying to put up a face. There was only one thing Kate might have told her. "Maybe it isn't as bad as you think, Aggy. You better hear me out. Will you?"

She sighed. Her eyes filled with a deplorable guilt. "Will I hear you out, Tha'? Of course I will. What else can I do?"

"I wanted to tell you about it," he began, "long ago. But I just couldn't. Not that I held back for my own sake. But for yours."

Her silence, her reproving stare encompassed him.

"You see, Agnes, I had a hunch that things were going to come to a head between us. And this isn't boasting. But I felt that nothing could've stopped your caring for me. And my telling you about all that— Why it would've given you just one more fence to hurdle.

"But to come to the point. I s'pose Mrs. Mercer told you about Joe. And Agnes, may God help me if this isn't the truth. There's no way of my telling if Joe's my boy. It's not that I want to paint her black. But there's reason to believe that not only isn't he my boy—but that he isn't even her husband's.

"The boy doesn't look like her husband, though he's named for him. And he doesn't look like me. He's got his mother's red hair. And those same pale eyes, set far apart. And that same mean, wild look."

No use trying to get her to say anything. She was up to her old trick of not even looking at him. Hm, might as well get this over with.

"Fact of the matter is, Agnes, appearances are against me. Kate Mercer and I were—" Painful business, all right. "But I told you that long ago. And what's more, I'm taking care of the boy. And I guess I will for good and all. Just on her say-so."

"That's the hold she has on me. That's why she gets a fat check outa me every month. That's why she feels she can come here and keep on pesterin'. That's why I stand for all her devilment."

Agnes had begun to sway to and fro in rhythmic agony. Her soul was stretched out in the cradle of sorrow. The ancient lullaby of pain was singing her into slumbering senselessness.

Pardway, beholding her, was deeply moved. It was a lot for her to bear, he told himself. It was hard, damnably hard, that this should have come into her young life.

And yet, even in this rare moment when he felt for her out of a full heart, his impulse to dominate, to reshape another's disfavor, to reaffirm his kinship with the conquerors—all these egotistic inclinations made him want to flop her over like a flap-jack, to twist her anguish and antipathy into a loving sympathy!

"I know you're awful hurt about this, Aggy," he mumbled. "And I don't blame you. But hurt as you are, too hurt even to look at me—I wonder if you can see my side of it?"

"I don't s'pose you can imagine how much I'd like to be sure that little Joe's my boy. I don't s'pose you have any idea of what goes on in me when I look at him. Look

at his hair. Look at his eyes. Look at his hands. Search all over—trying to find some sign of me.

“I go to see him every coupla weeks. Tell you what happens when I’m over there. His mother puts him to bed as soon’s she can. And she always makes him repeat a prayer she’s taught him. He says:

‘Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.’

And after that he says, ‘And please, God, punish Thane Pardway.’ And over and over he says that to himself. And then he falls asleep saying, ‘Please, God, punish Thane Pardway.’ ”

The infinite sadness of human life touched at her thoughts with cool, persuasive hands—touched at her thoughts—and plaited them into a new design. Her own hands became tenderly atremble. She experienced the same, recurrent emotion that she always felt when he floundered about in a deep, heavy humility. The images he had evoked began to glow in her mind. She could see him bulking over the child’s crib. She could see the flashing, angry eyes of the woman he had once loved. She could see the little moving lips whose very prayers had been perverted by hatred—

“Course, Joe doesn’t know any better,” he was saying. “He’s only repeating what she’s taught him. And when he’s old enough to understand, I guess she’ll tell him why he’s s’posed to hate me. And I guess he will.” He stirred resignedly. “Well, I don’t s’pose you can understand that.”

It was a long while before she spoke. And then she said, “Mrs. Mercer merely told me that you still came to visit her. And she showed me a check you’d given her. She didn’t tell me about—the boy.”

As truly surprised as Pardway was at this turn of things, he was even more surprised at what had gone on in himself. What had made him feel that she knew the real nature of Kate's claim on him? Some instinctive guilt, perhaps. Was there, then, such a thing as conscience? And if so, did he have one?

Hard, hard to believe!

In a manner he felt that Agnes had tricked him. And though he wanted her to feel that such was the case—he knew that she had been as much the victim of his guilt as he himself. Somehow, he was glad that it all had happened. This had been the one thing of his past he never could quite bring himself to tell her. It had been the one flat note in him, and now it was out of his system. Moreover, hers was the guilt of having led him into the trap. In a curious way it brought them closer. Each of them, somehow, had misled the other.

It was also somewhat helpful to Agnes in revaluing herself. It made him seem more human. She had been weak. So had he. She had sinned. So had he. And his, perhaps, was the more tragic involvement, what with the quandary over the child, the hatred of the woman, the—O so many things!

Before she had felt sorry for him because he was so devoid of spiritual qualities. Now there was a flesh and blood tragedy in which he stood quite helpless.

Yet, through all this morass of sin and shame and sorrow there was some shining light held out to her. Perhaps she could prevail upon him, in those passion moments in which he was most malleable—perhaps she could prevail upon him to do better by the boy.

Now she found herself rising like a siren from her sea of shame, and calling to him, coaxing him into an acceptance of her surrender—(for it still was surrender, she having as yet experienced no physical need of him.) And often, when she had him in bed beside her, she would talk to him

about this boy whose paternity he was truly not certain of. Why didn't he see him more often?

"Just breaks my heart," he had answered. "Besides, she doesn't want me around. I have to fight to see him as it is."

Then why didn't he take Joe? And have him live in this very house? She would do everything for him.

"Well," he mumbled, "that's nice of you, Aggy. I appreciate it, but—" After all, he continued, Joe was Kate's boy. She had her rights in the matter. Time and again he had offered to take custody of the child, but she simply wouldn't let go.

"Isn't there something we could do about it?" she would ask him. "Isn't there *something*?"

He would make a sad, clicking sound with his tongue, and shrug his heavy shoulders.

She began to realize that this was a hopelessly complicated set of circumstances in which her intentions, however worthy, were of no avail. And still, she wondered, couldn't she do something, *something*, to lend him a consciousness of all the softer, finer sentiments and things? He was, in his fashion, more responsive now than ever. But even so, to think that she had to use this means! Well, life was strange. Only evil had come out of all her virginal goodness. Who could tell, perhaps a merciful Providence would evoke good out of her adulterous evil.

Pardway, for all his preoccupation with the wheat, could not remain oblivious to the upheaval in Agnes. A massive, unyielding pity possessed him—a massive unyielding pity that only made him feel, in the end, that he was a very unusual man because he could sympathize with her and still be unchanged by these sympathies. And he really did feel for her. He thought of her as some one caught up in an inevitable fascination for him, much as he was helplessly caught up by the fascination of the wheat.

Nevertheless, he knew that he hadn't been entirely un-

affected by her. For one thing there was that conscience business. Maybe he really had one. And this soul, or finer sense, or something like that. Maybe that was hidden away in him too. He had come into a sharper consciousness of the softer things. There was that Millet, for instance, up on the library wall. He had somehow come closer to it. He never could look at it, now, without it taking something out of him. As if he had to pay the price of admission to a show he once had passes for. Funny, this change in him since Agnes and he—

Curious, there hadn't been a reproach from her. Not even a mention of the whole business. But she seemed to feel, now, that there was something he should be aware of. A soul—or something like that.

"Don't you feel it?" she would ask him in their moments of passion. "Aren't you different?"

"Yah," he would reply, turning on his side and surveying her. Sort of looked like a silver birch in the moonlight. Hm. And her hands, cold, intense, playing over him, begging him to answer. And by God, all he felt was that he'd like it a lot better if she didn't pester him with what wasn't.

And yet, he couldn't get up enough gumption to say so. She sort of had the edge on him these days. "Yah, I get the idea, Aggy," he would reply.

Sometimes he would feel her lost soul wandering about in him, seeking some foothold. For he knew that she now regarded herself as having lost an infinite grace. And through this disturbing consciousness, particularly when she lay beside him, the hurly-burly world spun out of his mind. And the pale gossamer of the moonlight wove webs of merciful wishes about his hard, unyielding heart. And the sparkling lights of the dripping stars seemed to strike fire into his borrowed soul.

Once, at such a time, he could not help thinking: The white body of a beloved woman is a bridge into the beyond.

CHAPTER XXIV

LIFE GOES ON

HAD any one told Agnes Weatherly that the general flow of her life would be the same after her seduction as before, she would have been appalled. Was she not the Daughter of Babylon, the Soulless, the Denied? For such as she was it not written: "Behold, you are less than nothing, and your work is less than a breath. He that is an abomination alone chooseth you."

And yet, the Hebrew prophets to the contrary, no vast change had occurred in the daily comings and going of this girl. Perhaps the mills of the gods grind slowly. Perhaps the Divine Vengeance works in inscrutable ways— At any rate, Agnes Weatherly may have been despoiled by Thane Pardway, but she had not been defiled by life.

It was a Saturday night upon which she had been seduced, the last Saturday in September, 1886. She repeated this over and over. She knew it would cling to her through all the years.

Her first trial came on the following Thursday. Glen was to call. She felt that she could not face him. After much dwelling upon the means of putting him off, she wrote a letter saying she was indisposed.

Glen sent flowers and candy. Glen sent a note saying he was sorry. Glen suggested, by mail, this outing and that— Glen! For a while, in his persevering attentions, he loomed as a persecutor.

Twice again appointments were made. Each time she found some excuse. Each time Swazie was sorry, patient, hopeful. Matters came to a point at which she could no longer evade him.

She appealed to Pardway.

"See him," he said. "Do you good."

And so, after much foreboding, she faced her young suitor. In a few minutes her fears vanished. Glen was so pleasant. He helped her with her rubbers, he admired her hat, and he made a pretty little speech in which he begged her to wear his violets.

After this evening, she decided, she must never see him again. She would think of some good reason.

But no good reason presented itself. Glen liked her. He was very nice to her. He talked about being a good friend, and within the bounds of opportunity, he certainly was.

All this was strange to her. Stranger still, the fact that she liked Glen, and enjoyed being with him, and felt very friendly toward him.

He came again and again. She was surprised that Thane greeted him so cordially. And as before, Thane saw to it that they were provided with theater tickets, that they were invited to gay suppers, that Glen was the recipient of every cordiality that a rich man might extend to his ward's suitor.

Once, feeling faint and sick because of Pardway's amiableness, she said, "I don't think I can see you any more, Glen."

"I'm sorry, Agnes. I've been a beast."

She did not know what he meant. Did he think she resented his resting his fingers on her shoulders after he had helped her into her coat?

"I'm *awfully* sorry," he was pleading. "I won't do it again."

She almost asked, "Do what?" But she smiled, and could not help falling into a forgiving mood. "All right, Glen, if you're really sorry."

Over and over she told herself that it was wrong to go on this way. And yet, the thought of doing without him made her unhappy. For one thing, she was thoroughly comfortable when Glen was around. She had never been comfortable with Thane. Glen yearned for her and spoke lovingly

to her. Thane possessed her, and went on scheming his earth-enveloping schemes.

And now her abject devotion to Thane brought her a deep, haunting appreciation of the manner in which he reveled in his mastery. She began to harbor a curious desire to be the dominant note in some one's life. Almost by way of striking a balance with her flaccid will, she sought for some one who could be firmly compelled. Pardway, of course, was out of the question. But Glen Swazie—she could foist her will upon him.

And so she did—to what purpose she herself did not know.

She had been caught up in a rapidly revolving circle of forces, a sort of ferris-wheel of circumstances that swung her giddily around from gloom to a festooned gayety, from the drudgery of crop estimates to dreams under the moon, from the effacement of self before the man she loved—to the superimposing of her personality upon the man who loved her.

Glen, of course, kept on coming. Now that Agnes was asking him to do thus and so, he felt that her interest in him had quickened.

Through this period of her first involvement with love and physical passion, Agnes experienced so much that was new to her, so much that was at variance with her virginal day dreams. She was like a person transported to a mythical place where wonderful and startling and shameless things happened. And in the ecstacy of her first love, in being at once participant and spectator of the pageantry of the passions, she was so enthralled, mystified, bewildered and beshamed by all that happened—that she imagined herself in some veritable hell of delight.

For now that she had forsaken the path that led to God for the back alleys of passion that led to the Devil—she was constantly seeking some torture at the hands of her transgression. She devoted hours to imagining herself fearfully

degraded, utterly forlorn, forever lost—pampering herself with all the perversities of an ascetic who cannot freely accept passion. At every possible twist and turn she tantalized, penalized and tortured herself. If Thane was late for dinner, he did not love her. If she, on the other hand, did not realize that he was late until ten minutes after the usual hour, then she did not love him. And if she did not love him—she was not only lost to God, but to the Devil. Ah, she asked herself, what was she but some distraught fiend who had no niche in either Heaven or Hell?

She found an infinite, excruciating delight in even the most trivial incidents of their association. The terms of endearment by which he now hailed her became a mystic, moving code to hitherto unrevealed chapters of the book of days.

Ah, those terms of endearment—do they not make a language which has never had the services of a lexicographer? What of the bird-calls, the sound-signals that salute a desired presence, the pretty phrases of passion which cloak some diplomatic deceit? Are not all these the argot of a holy romance language of the emotions, a veritable Latin of Love?

We come, then, to the declension of "Patti"—a sobriquet dedicated by Thane to Agnes, the songstress. Patti became Pat, Pat became Pet, Pet became Petti. And Agnes became Aggy, Aggy languished into Ag, and Ag melted into a long Italian A.

It was all so sweet, so painful, so insecure. There was nothing in her relationship with Thane that she could hold onto, that could make her think that things were right, comfortable, sane.

And now she felt that she hardly had a place in his world. Day by day she saw his increasing absorption in the wheat. She would look at him, studying his cold, intent eyes, those arrogant bulges rising from his lowering brows, the sleek black hair falling over the sides of his swarthy, forceful, sometimes frowning face. "It's comin',

I tell yah," he would say. "There sure will be a shortage. Coupla months ago I thought it didn't amount to anything. But now—" His pinkish lips swelled forth in a massive pout, his hand closed over his squarish chin, and he stared into space—an entranced crystal gazer beholding a massive chaos.

"I dreamed of you last night," she said.

He slowly raised his heavy lids, glanced at her in the manner of a man who has learned that nothing is to be unexpected. "That so?"

For a while he would look at her, not knowing what to say. "Funny, ain't it, the way women dream?" He shook himself. "Well, I got a lotta thinking to do. Just received a queer piece of news from Cincinnati. If you don't mind, Agnes, I'll see yah later."

After containing herself for a while, she would venture, "Don't you like to talk about love?"

"Yah." He rose and slowly stretched his arms. "Yah, I like to talk about it. Well, what were you goin' to say?"

"I dreamed of you last night," she repeated, as though nothing could be more meaningful.

He nodded. It was another of those nods indicating that her communication had been received, contents noted, and filed for future reference.

Perhaps, she thought, perhaps he had not heard.

"I dreamed—"

"Yah. So you told me a little while ago." He resumed his seat at the library table.

Why wouldn't he ever talk about love? Love! O, the languish of it! O, the languour! O, the lingering echoes and evocations! Why wouldn't he talk about love?

She took his head in her hands. "Look at me," she begged, "look into my eyes and tell me what you see."

And he, momentarily stirred by her emotions, peered away at her. "I see a dream," he mumbled vaguely, "there's a dream of my body—in your eyes."

He shook himself. His heavy arms swept up and struck

her hands from his face. "Christ!" He sputtered, "me talkin' poetry!"

"Tha', dear," she began, wanting to calm him, "Tha', dear—"

"Now listen here, you!" he exclaimed, waving his forefinger. "What are you doin'? Gettin' yourself all crazy! And me too! How do you expect me to keep my mind on my work?" He reared up, started marching around the room . . . and around the room . . . and around the room!

"I'm sorry, Agnes," he said after a bit, "I didn't mean to fly up at you. It just sorta— Well, you know. It's hard to explain."

To his surprise, she did not wilt under his outburst. She actually seemed to be blooming with delight. He wondered why. It did not occur to him that for a moment, at least, she had awakened him to all the hysterical tremolos of passion that played upon her. He was telling himself that all women, good or bad, just loved to raise hell with a man. Now here was a good girl, there never was a better—just trying to rip the guts out of him. And what was worse, in that *loving* way—to which there was no answer. Furthermore, she seemed to forget that Henry Cullom was within earshot. And that he had other things to think about besides the funny nonsense she dreamed last night.

Other things to think of? You bet your life! Hadn't his agents informed him that the Harper-Wiltshire people intended to try for their corner after the First of the year? And didn't he know for a certainty, now, that Kershaw was hooked up with Lamson; Albright; Irwin, Green & Co.; and half a dozen others? And to top all that—wasn't he up against a shortage, a shortage so definite as to make a corner plausible?

Why in God's name couldn't she see that he had a load on his mind? Huh! It wasn't that. She saw it, all right. Trouble was—she couldn't restrain herself. And it wasn't as if Henry had his night off, and they could go upstairs,

and something could come of all this yapping about love, love, love. No, that was a funny part of it. She wasn't interested in the physical side of it. What she wanted to do was talk about it. "Christ Almighty!" he exclaimed angrily, fuming over the curious disposition of a woman who just wanted to *talk* about it.

Yes, life went on. The increasingly ardent Glen appeared with a sprightly regularity. Thane, heavy and brooding, stared into space and mumbled to himself. Agnes, immersed in his problems, and lost in the great swishing sea of emotions, still found time to prepare for her concert with Madame Cecile's most advanced pupils. And though these people and things made up the major portion of her days, she was not full of them.

That which had always been most vital to her consciousness was still its pivotal point. For with unswerving simplicity she still kept tryst with her maiden soul through confessional.

And she had to steel herself to do it. For each time she felt she would be found out. That little part of herself that had been paralyzed by passion, she feared, would stir about in the vast, soothing, stony stillness. And yet—

Over and over she counted out her sins. The little white lies. The little black thoughts. On and on, in an endless stream— Now there was only one more thing to be said. But some screeching insistence from within would keep her silent. Then she felt that Father Dion must be so sad. Finally, she found herself wandering away from the gray stones. And she realized that she had said nothing, nothing—nothing of any importance. Why had she been so still? She did not know. Perhaps it was because there were no words for the terrible thing she had done. Perhaps it was because she hardly felt herself guilty when she passed within those sacred portals. But it was wrong, wrong, just to confess to the same, silly little things.

As the weeks went by the thought of revealing her secret

became as shadowy as a childhood dream. For as she passed beneath the panoply of her passion, she left behind the rigors of orthodox observances. Her thoughts turned less and less about the tenets that the Church has bound about the Trinity. Her mind dwelled upon an immemorable mercy. And she felt that softness of soul which Christ seems to have saved for sinners.

And yet, the structure upon which her soul-sense had been supported through the years, could not easily be forgotten. In the back reaches of her mind lay a mess of jumbled images that represented the more material manifestations of Catholicism. Just as she remembered little more of her childhood than the unavoidable ditties, now she recalled hardly more than the most striking terminology of a girlish faith. Curious combinations of ritualistic phrases, words that made themselves significant because of the sensations they evoked—such addenda to the waxworks museum of her mind echoed through her consciousness like the notes of a forgotten symphony. Of this confusion were such snatches as, "The churching of women . . . Maundy Thursday . . . the three hundred days' indulgence . . . the councils of Lateran, Constance and Trent . . . the chrism . . . the Resurrection and the Life. . . ." And she could not shake off a mocking rhyme Thane had told her:

"The Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost.
Which of them do you love most?"

There was really no shrinking of faith or religious emotion in Agnes Weatherly. She was undergoing a sensuous delirium in which the shapes of things assume weird aspects. More and more Thane Pardway was becoming the steadfast, recognizable image, in contrast to which all else was vague and shadowy. Life was forcing a brutal truth upon her—the unswerving reality of pain.

And yet, time and again she cringed in psychic horror before the distortion of her religious devotions. Despite

her passionate fixation for Thane Pardway, and all its attendant confusion, she could not evade the conscience that cursed her out for a false confessional. And aping the man she loved, in a troubled half-crafty manner she tried to circumlocute the anathemas of remorse.

Over and over she recounted the Seven Sacraments. What of baptism, confirmation, the Lord's Supper, penance, holy orders, matrimony and extreme unction? She had been baptized, confirmed, partaken of the communion, done penance—and she was doing a terrible penance. As to holy orders, they were not the province of the layman. Matrimony—? Well, she fervently prayed that she would some day be married. And surely, before she faded out of the flesh, extreme unction would be administered.

As for confessional—there was no mention of it in the Seven Sacraments. And so if she hadn't made a complete statement of her sinning— She was really not running headlong into the preordained, was she? True enough, penance was meted out by the confessor, in accordance with one's transgression. But as that transgression need not be told—

So Agnes, the believer, was becoming a theologian.

CHAPTER XXV

ECSTASY

THANE PARDWAY, for all his scoffing, had a curious regard for some of the popular notions as to success.

Not that every man who strived would succeed, not that the early bird always caught the worm—but that on the whole, these were pretty sound principles. To be sure, they didn't help most people. But that was because most people were— At any rate, he assured himself, if only he tried hard enough, he could smash the Kershaw-Lamson corner and become the prevailing force in The Pit.

As to how this was to be accomplished—he was still in the dark. Meanwhile, he was continually spreading his net of espionage. Now he was going to involve the two women who stood at the very poles of Chicago society, Mrs. Ogden Downers and Mollie Florence. They would get him the high and low on those who might be attached to Lamson and Albright. He wanted to know how D. W. Irwin spent his evenings, what devious trails Dewar followed when no one was looking, what particular concerns E. W. Bailey and J. H. Yorke had. And how about George Brine, McGeoch, M. C. Orr, Eldridge, Pickering and Balding? Respected members of the community, to be sure. But then, still water ran deep. Better see if he couldn't get a line on these whited sepulchers that loved the bull side and C. J. Kershaw.

For a moment Thane silently considered his recent meetings, at Indianapolis, with one Edgelow of Cincinnati. Didn't quite like that narrow forehead, the hawk nose and the pale, shifty eyes. But still, Edgelow seemed to be a pretty sharp fellah. Costing a good round sum, too. Well,

didn't matter as long as he undermined Harper's Fidelity.

Over and over, with a heavy ecstasy, Thane recounted the vast number of intricate details which had entered into his hardly formulated plans. He indulged in this passionate devotion with the ardor of a zealot telling his pater-noster. In a vague manner it had a prayerful influence upon him. Somehow, he felt, in going over and over these links in the chain that would coil about the Kershaw Corner, an inspiring notion might possess him.

Meanwhile he marked time, dreaming in the dark, extending his lines of communication and keeping them in constant repair by wholesale favors and the payment of sums that were beginning to tell upon his bank account.

His most ready means of holding his local minions in worshipful subjugation was the constant string of parties he "threw." Hardly an evening passed but what he was stirring up some expensive merriment. Agnes no longer attended those affairs. She had gradually retired from this social whirl. On occasion she could be persuaded to come along if Daniel Pardway was in attendance. Then this consideration lost its attractiveness. She suspected, vaguely, that Daniel had annexed Dorothy Irwin. Somehow he sank in her esteem. How she could reconcile this attitude with the facts of her own life—she did not know. Nevertheless, there it was.

Thane was not without cognizance of her antipathy for his parties. But he did not care to do anything about it. Each time he was about to leave the house, he would ask her to come along. Should she happen to acquiesce, well and good. If she came forth with her usual, "No, thank you"—well and good. Had to keep his mind on business anyhow.

But he did not always keep his mind on business. Often with his cronies about him, he would smile a stiff, staid smile, mechanically utter the appropriate things, and wonder what his little girl was doing.

Little girl! It was an image that rose out of their sexual

play. And with the phrase fooling around in his mind, he would visualize one of the almost invariable scenes enacted when Emaline Brown was over at Daniel's, and Henry Cullom was gone for the night.

For a while she would be prim and politely distant. He would take her hand. Her soft, brown eyes would grow wide and stary. Her face, if anything, became a shade more pale.

He would look at her.

And suddenly, the starch would go out of her. In a minute or two she would be lying across his lap. His hand would rest over her breast. He would bend to kiss her. There would be a fluttering hesitancy about her. Then her lips would close. They kissed. More kisses. After a while he would be kissing her because she expected to be kissed.

The clock in the hall would chime.

One of his legs had gone pins and needles. Without making a point of it, he would shift his position. Then, by dint of seeming to be suddenly drawn to her, his arms would snatch her up, press her to him—the while raising her on the arm of the chair.

And as she was so perched beside him, with her arms about his shoulders, he would reach for a cigar. And he would smoke, feeling fat and lazy, gloating over his neglectful tolerance of her. Then he would glance down at her shoe tops and remark, "Aggy, you got awful slim ankles. Just like a little girl."

This was the invariable prelude to their "little girl" show. She would leave his side, shyly stand before him, lifting her skirts to her knees.

And he was always overcome by a slight annoyance. It was sort of up to him to do something, he would tell himself. But he didn't want to. She seemed like such a little girl—just a hypnotized little girl playing at being bad.

If possible, he would avoid any further passion play. And with a "Mind if I look over these charts, Aggy?" he

would pick up some of the papers scattered over the table.

But at such times, he knew, he never got anything done. And she moved unhappily about him. And the more disturbed they became, the more he seemed bent on work. In order to simulate the appearance of one deeply involved, he would laboriously decipher an old cable.

At such moments, she never failed to come up to him, and slowly twine her arms about his head.

"Thane, dear," she would say, "haven't you done enough for to-night?" Immediately she felt that this was the wrong track. Just because she thought he had done enough, he would want to stay up till dawn, gulping down glass after glass, and formulating some theory as to the future of the market.

"Tha', dear," she would add, "that cable isn't important any more. Why look at it? It's two weeks old."

A poutish frown would swell up over his face. "Can't tell," he would mumble. "We might 'a' made a mistake on it. I better reread it."

It was despicable, she told herself, to be crafty with him—crafty as he had been with her. And yet, she wanted so to have him, to have his mind, his heart fixed on her. "I love you dear," she crooned over his shoulder. "Let me put my hands over your eyes. Your dear, tired eyes. Please," she begged, "I'd love to."

"Well—" his forgiving growl would wash over her, "go ahead."

Thane, because of his mystical brooding over the far flung world of the wheat, because of the faint, soft illumination Agnes had brought into his harsh life—was dispassionately wondering if he possessed a soul.

And Agnes, because of her religious precepts, because of his apathetic neglect—thought she had lost her soul.

In her isolation and preoccupation with the mottled fabric of their association, she would recall a stream of treasured images, reminiscences, and palpitant moments. As she

turned these over and over in her mind, they became a veritable rosary of their passion. Hour after hour she would sit, recounting these episodes, and with each she would pause in silent prayer, imploring the pagan gods for some lasting grace for her love.

At times she could not help trying to inveigle Thane into an interest in this passionate processional. She would tell him, over and over again, how she felt at the moment he had put his hand to her throat, how her skin had burned under his touch, how dazed, and drunk with delight she would become when she felt all the force of his passion directed to her.

Once he asked, "Aggy, what makes you talk this way?"

"I don't know," she answered, a little wildly, "I don't know." She looked at him, she looked, looked— And suddenly she laughed. "You're so uncomfortable when I stare at you, Tha'. Just as I used to be when you stared at me. Why don't you stare at me any more, Tha'?"

"Well," he began, feeling that there wasn't any answer to this sort of thing. "Well—what's the use? Ain't polite." She was almost grinning at him. Hm, he couldn't take her in these days. "Anyway, why don't you answer my question, Petti? What do you tell me all this—this stuff for?"

"Do you remember," she countered, "when you asked me to listen to your story about Mrs. Mercer? Well, I want you to listen to another sinner telling a story. For the same reason. To try to make you feel as I feel. To get your sympathy. Your understanding."

Hm. Playing a trick on him, was she? Well, he'd show her. "Pet," he said, "I've never taught a woman anything but what she didn't turn around and use it on me."

But this crass statement, much to his surprise, seemed to have no effect upon her. Maybe she didn't think she was playing a trick. And if she did think so, she was darn glad to have it upset him. Anyway, here she was, going on and on about how she felt when he did this, or that—

"Tell me you remember," she begged. "Tell me you remember when you first drew the ribbon there." She put her hand to her breast. "Tell me you remember when you touched me. I was so hot and cold all at once." The inflammable content of a passionate memory was spilling out over her being. Her lips grew warm. She talked rapidly and wildly.

"What else is there?" she demanded. "What else do I have? What else can I say?" And she fell at his feet, blushing and sobbing for shame.

Thane had never known any such outburst of a woman in love. He was conscious of the significance of it. The same qualities of ecstasy with which she once approached God were now inflaming her feeling for him. It was amazing. He respected it because it was profound, inexplicable, ingrained in the very fiber of her being. But he could not help dislike it. He would have been happy to work some change in Agnes whereby she would retain all the conventionalities of her virginal years—and still be his mistress. Why couldn't she be like other women whom he had known? Well, there wasn't any good answer except that she couldn't.

The quality of dismay slowly crept into his feeling for her. He could not understand how and why she had drifted from her pristine chastity to an incensed, bacchanalian exultation. He felt that she had gotten beyond him, that she was out of bounds, that he had no control over her. And what was more exasperating, through her ecstatic exaltation of their passion he became beholden to her. By God, how the girl loved him! But though he felt his indebtedness, he was repelled by the spectacle of her shameless, magical sensuality. Good Christ, he said to himself, he had at last found something that shocked him!

And remembering that he had done a lot of shouting about sex being a simple matter that ought not be shrouded in shame, he realized now, that he was a foul old lecher who regarded it as a pretty dirty business.

Here he had the girl, he told himself, and she was making a lot of hysterical noise about how beautiful it all was—and still he wasn't satisfied. What, what was it he wanted of her?

In a sense he wanted to despoil her, to besmirch and degrade her, to turn her into the conventional kept woman, with all the little harlotries, the businesslike attention to the matter of passion, and the rigmarole of a surface conventionality. But he knew that this would never be the case with her. She so transcended all the commonplaces and vulgarities, the little schemings, pleadings and teasings of all the women he had known.

He was compelled to respect her—and that very quality made him dispassionate. He felt he ought to marry her.

Instead, he gave her presents.

Now, huge boxes of flowers arrived hourly. He did not know it, but many of them remained unopened, piled up in the closet of her room.

Once he saw her sewing the leather tops of old shoes into the lining of her winter coat—and the next day a seal jacket arrived from Glanz's. She rarely wore it.

He noted that she preferred Tokay to other table wines—and several gallons were specially imported through August Wilken. She thanked him coldly, and scarcely touched her lips to it.

She loved Macbeth—and so, through a London collector, he obtained an old Folio. "I thought you had Shakespeare's complete works," was all she said.

Something had gone wrong, he felt. Perhaps it was that he hadn't given her much up till recent weeks. Well, he'd pour 'em out in profusion.

Studebaker built a special carriage for her. Two bays were bought. Henry Cullom was outfitted in driving livery.

"It's cold," she said. "Perhaps I'll ride in the spring."

He bought her an excellent copy of a Goyd nude—prob-

ably executed by a later master. She hung it in her room, in the shadows, out of conflict with the crucifix. But it flamed away in the dark, a reminder and a blushing symbol of her shame.

In the same week she received a strand of pearls. He had wanted to avoid jewelry. She might think it cheap. But still, nothing else worked. Maybe— She never wore the pearls.

Well, he decided, enough of that. Perhaps clothes and jewels and other material things made her feel kept. He'd get her an extravagant, beautiful, rich, magnificent thing—something hooked up with her religion.

And so his instructions went forth to all the dealer connoisseurs in America. One of them, Vladimir Ingelstrom, brought him a ciborium in filagreed gold, intersticed with Cavashawn emeralds, surmounted by a fiery, opal cross.

After a single, astonished glance, Pardway instinctively put his heavy hands over the treasure. "It's mine," he said. "What the hell is it?"

Ingelstrom, a polished, austere man, explained that the ciborium was the receptacle for the holy eucharist, for the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. It was a very old, very sacred, very rare relic.

With his intrinsic appreciation of distinction and mastery, no matter what its expression, Thane realized immediately that no more exquisite memorandum of the lost art of goldsmiths would ever come to his attention. "How much?" he queried.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Hell's bells! He had been too darn anxious. Well, no use quibbling. "Sold," he said.

It was so unique a gift, that he did not care to present it himself. Agnes would want to be alone with it, he decided.

And so the ciborium was delivered by messenger. Tied to it was a small card, bearing the inscription, "To my Aggy."

Thane did not go home for several days. When he next

saw her she thanked him elaborately. And yet, he saw that some immeasurable sadness possessed her. Moreover, the ciborium was nowhere to be seen. One day, when she was at Madame Cecile's, he did something that he felt was terribly squalid. He searched her room, and found the relic hidden away in her bureau, wrapped about with scented paper.

He did not understand. But he felt that this was one thing he had best not inquire into.

He did not know, he could not know the horror with which she regarded it. A ciborium, she had told herself. Probably from some medieval cathedral, where for centuries it had held the bread and the wine of the communion. A cup within which had lived the very crystallization of the Christ!

To her it was as if he who had first drawn her from the path of righteousness was now sending her a symbol of all she had forsaken. To thank him for it was a sort of crucifixion. Sometimes, after locking the door of her room, she took it out and touched it gingerly. She would try to think of it as just so much chased and filagreed gold, garnished with emeralds. But it was an impossible image. A deep, holy crimson would seem to flush up its sides. And then she beheld the card that had come with it, and the thick, forceful imprint of his stub pen, "To my Aggy."

She was finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the hysteria of passion that made her forget the virginal world in which she once dwelled. Occasionally she saw herself as she had appeared not so many years ago. Her pale, shiny face. The pigtailed hanging down her shoulders. The blue convent uniform. And staring at herself in the mirror, she felt that she was still essentially the same. And yet—

A long, heavy weight, like a pendulum, slowly swung back and forth in her heart. From her consciousness of Catholicism it swung to her sublimation of the man she could not help loving. It did not seem right to her, it

did not seem believable that a mind and a body should belong to these two entities. How could two such separate states of consciousness live within her? And yet, there was that sensation of the pendulum swinging to and fro . . . to and fro. . . .

She picked up the card that bore the legend of their love, crushed it to her breast, and kissed it. And her hot, free-flowing tears dripped down into the sacred vessel which for centuries had held the communion of Christ.

Nothing is so swift, so sensitive, so inexplicably sad, so subject to the play of light and shade as a great passion.

Thane Pardway did not know this. If he had, it probably would not have altered him one whit. For he would only have thought of it as applied to himself, as it affected his monstrous yearning for power.

And so, when in the midst of his concern over the latest bit of pyrotechnics on the part of 'Old Hutch'—he minimized every possible import of Agnes Weatherly's repeated avowals. He felt that in her constant rehearsing and re-asserting the revery of their intimate association, she was attempting to convert him to a similar regard for it. What did it matter to him that she must linger over the litany of her love? He thought of it as some ill-concealed argument, as a doctrine of faith that she wanted to foist upon him, as a reminder of his share in her betrayal.

"O, it was so beautiful," she whispered, referring to an incident of their passion, "so beautiful—"

So's the ciborium, was his silent retort.

But he was in no mood to dispute this new evangelism. Out of some primal respect for passion, out of his inability to cope with sentiment, out of his preoccupation with the wheat—came some unspoken forbearance.

But why, he wondered, why *did* she go on and on?

"Once, Thane," she was saying, "once I was so cold. And then you touched me. And I became so warm." Her lips were trembling, her voice limpid, her eyes shiny.

"And once," she remembered, telling another bead of the pagan rosary, "once you kissed me. And it seemed that my face was burning. And I didn't breathe any more."

He said nothing.

She picked up his heavy, limp hand and pressed her teeth against his knuckles. "I'm so ashamed," she sobbed, "so ashamed." Her soul lay shivering under the trembling wings of mortification and helplessness.

"Agnes," he said, "let me ask you something. And if you don't want to answer, it's all right with me. Do you tell Father Dion all this stuff?"

Her pale face, he thought, looked like an artificial flower touched off by a match. It flushed and expanded with a nervous titter. Then it crinkled and grew grave.

"Well, Aggy?"

She walked to the window. Her small hand clutched at the curtain. She looked out into the garish shadows of the city dusk. "I see the lamplighter coming," she murmured. "Every evening I watch him go by."

"That's no answer, Aggy."

"Please, Thane, please," she implored, "let me tell you those things. I don't ask anything else. Just that."

A long, searching stare passed between them—that long, searching stare of affinities who are not kindred souls.

Suddenly he understood. No, she had not confessed her transgression to Father Dion. But she harbored an urgent need of it. And the only one to whom she could reveal herself was the man she loved. And so these reminiscences, at first whispered in worshipful adoration, were now—

She loves me, he thought, so I have become her god and her confessor!

CHAPTER XXVI

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

NOW that the world of the wheat was faced with the prospect of a real shortage, Thane again set about confusing the issue. Vonda, Argus and 'Silent' Tompkins were told to shout out that the figures of the past weeks were incomplete, that there were other tabulations more recently compiled which gave evidence of a normal yield, that it was too early to jump to conclusions.

Meanwhile he was perfecting his means of attack. All this moonshine he had caused to be broadcast, he knew, would hardly affect the Harper-Lamson-Kershaw people. After each bit of fol-de-rol they might be temporarily upset and annoyed—but in the long run they knew the world wheat market as well as it could be known. Moreover, they were going ahead with their plans. This he knew through his agents.

Ah, his agents. Now their number was increased by Major Jefferson Oleander who had become a climber on the Albright vine. And Rosa Duveyne was revealing interesting matters of Albright's playtimes. Somehow the bits of fringe tied about Thane were becoming noticeable in the magic carpet of the world of the wheat—more and more noticeable as their benefactor assumed a more dominant position.

The first definite information as to the preparations of the bull clique came through Oleander. The Kershaw-Albright-Lamson representatives in The Pit, according to Major Jeff, would shortly break off present arrangements, and enter into their own ring settlement with three other firms.

To Pardway this was a very interesting tidbit. It meant that those fellows were unquestionably working together, that they might execute Harper's trades out of a common fund, that they probably would handle their wash sales in this manner. It was a purely technical point, of the sort he did not ordinarily trouble himself with—but under the circumstances, important.

He sought confirmation through Solomon Einfangle. This worthy reported that similar arrangements would soon be made by Maurice Rosenfeld & Co. but with whom, and when he did not know. As soon as he did—he would notify Mr. Pardway.

Now Thane sent for 'Parson' Lerch. The 'Parson' was a tall, raw-boned, dark-skinned Swede of dour and foreboding countenance, who had for many years been leader of the Thane Pardway & Co. forces on the floor of the Board of Trade.

"Sit down, Parson," Thane said genially, extending his humidor. "Anything new over in The Pit?"

"Nothing you don't know," Lerch answered. He felt that Pardway had taken more notice of him recently. And it was not without purpose, he reasoned, that the boss had come down to the office every day of the last two weeks.

"They tell me, Parson, that Albright and Kershaw are going to have their own ring settlement. Heard anything about it?"

Lerch shook his bony head.

"Well, keep a sharp lookout. And you needn't say anything about our little talk. That's all."

There was a number of such conferences between Thane and his other floor-traders, Silas Dore and Anton Pulski. These days the offices of Thane Pardway & Co. held a friendly, holiday warmth. From old Geoffrey Selfridge at the reception-room gate down to young Wilkins in the very shadow of the inner shrine, a genial radiant warmth ran in human relay. No doubt about it, Mr. Pardway was going to be generous this coming Christmas.

And 'Parson' Lerch, who suspected that Pardway's sudden interest in his employees meant that they would shortly be called upon to support him in The Pit, kept his own counsel—and Frank Lamson's money.

One day, as Thane sat in his office, mulling things over, a Mrs. Zena Albans was shown in.

Zena Albans was a tall, shapely brunette. Her black hair was brushed down over the sides of her striking face with an air of classic bereavement. Her eyes, black, warm, singularly brilliant—were in sharp contrast to that pert, cold, white nose, the ticklish nose of a passionate cat.

"Anything I can do for you, mam?" Pardway was saying.

Mrs. Albans turned the warm flood of her eyes upon him. "Mr. Pardway, I'd like your opinion as to the best thing to do in the market."

"Stay out of it."

Her crimped lips, as if constrained for kissing, flexed a little. "I thought you'd say that." She spoke with a slight sinuous lisp. "I'm not really in need of advice. Will you buy some wheat for me?"

"I haven't any women customers, mam, and I—"

"Don't want them?" Rather amused at her own sagacity, she said, "Those were exactly Frank Lamson's words. Then I told him I'd come here. He wagered a hundred dollars that you wouldn't take my account. Do I lose, Mr. Pardway?"

"Lady, you win! I'm willing to take your business, long's it'll cost Lamson money. What'll it be, five thousand bushels?"

She hadn't quite decided, it seemed, whether to make it a hundred thousand, or—

"Say! Do you know what that'll come to?"

She handed him a certified check for ten thousand dollars. "I think this will be all you will require at present," she said, making ready to leave. "Buy cash wheat. If

the market slips, I shall be very glad to post additional margins."

Mrs. Albans visited at Thane Pardway & Co. two or three times a week. She always asked for the head of the firm, executed a good many trades, most of which were profitable. Invariably, she tried to draw him into a discussion about the state of the market. And failing in that, she would ramble on about plays, restaurants and the talk of the town.

Like as not, Thane decided, she was playing some game. Seemed to know Lamson quite well. Wouldn't be surprised, but what Lamson was using her to find out what was going on at Thane Pardway & Co. But should this be the case, why would she openly declare her friendship for Frank Lamson? Why would she say she liked Orville Albright, and boast of having been to his magnificent house? How could she dare mention Agnes?

"How'd you know about Agnes?" he had asked her.

"Why I met her one night," Mrs. Albans replied unhesitatingly. "She was with young Mr. Swazie. He works for Lamson & Biggers, you know. I was being escorted by Fred Biggers. We ran into them." Her ringing, silvery laughter pealed out. "You're not the suspicious sort like your friend Mr. Hutchinson, are you?"

"Hutch?" he queried, thinking that this woman was becoming more and more interesting. "What do you know about Hutch?"

"Why I saw you talking to each other last Wednesday at the Board of Trade." Her perplexing laughter descended upon him again. "He didn't seem to trust you."

"Lady," he said, "you know too much. I don't know if you know too much for my good—or for your good. But you know too much."

The tip of her tongue ran in and out of her crimped lips. "You aren't afraid of me, are you?" she lisped

tauntingly. "Aren't you certain that a big strong man like you can handle a weak woman like me?"

It was a challenge, a spicy, arrogant, sensual challenge. Thane Parway could not resist it. "There ain't man or woman," came his brash rumble, "that ever made me feel afraid. And I got a hunch that many a man in my position would have good reason to be leery of you." He smiled. "But far as I'm concerned, mam, if there's anything you'd like to know about me—just speak up."

"If Frank Lamson takes the bull side next spring—will you sell short?"

Well, no sense trying to evade her. She was too smart. The only way to puzzle her was by telling the truth. "Sure," he said, "sure I'll sell him short. Sell him shorter'n Little Egypt's skirts. Anything else you want to know?"

"A number of things," she replied evenly. "I'll ask them when the time comes."

All the while a somewhat similar situation was shaping itself in Parway's more personal affairs.

Agnes, for all her love of Thane, was still seeing Glen Swazie. The young man's attentions added a sweet flavor to her bitter cup. At times, when he was about, she felt delightfully shy, maidenly. She could forget, for a few hours, the overbearing, overwhelming personage who held her spellbound.

"I love you Agnes," Glen had said. "I want to marry you."

The simplicity and earnestness of his plea weighed upon her. She could no longer deny him with stock phrases. They must part. And she must tell him the whole truth. Or—she must marry him. No, that was impossible! She didn't love him. It wouldn't be fair. She belonged to Thane. Thane, Thane, Thane—the word rang on in her consciousness like the crashing chorus of a mighty passion. Thane—if only *he* would marry her!

Glen! Perhaps he would help her. If she told him the truth. If she appealed to his goodness, his generosity—would he become her intercessor with Thane?

No, she decided, she would only lose him. And Thane would merely be annoyed. She must find some other way. Perhaps if she flaunted her regard for Glen—

In the offices of Thane Pardway & Co. sat a tall, willowy woman with a glistening pompadour, who was attempting to minimize her failure. "Thane," she announced, "I just can't get anything on Frank Lamson. . . He won't pay any attention to me."

Thane surveyed Elsa Glynn. This was the one case, he mused, in which Lamson had outdone him. Lamson had set a much more interesting woman on his trail. No wonder this one hadn't succeeded. "Well," he said, "what seems to be the trouble?"

Elsa recited her list of grievances, among them Lamson's interest in another woman.

"What woman?"

Well, she didn't know the name. But she had a small, tight mouth, a voluptuous figure, bright, black eyes—

Probably Mrs. Albans, Thane decided. "Elsa, where did you ever run into her?"

"They're at Victor Lassagne's every night after theater," Miss Glynn reported. "And sometimes they dine in the private room."

He nodded. "Keep up the good work," he ordered. "You get paid whether you find out anything or not. G'by."

As a result of this conference he decided to confront Lamson and Mrs. Albans. He would arrange a party, and if possible, get those two to join. When he asked Agnes to come along, she said, "I'm sorry, Tha'. I'm going somewhere with Glen Swazie."

"All right," he replied, "drop in at Lassagne's later, if you like."

And so it happened, on a Saturday night, that Thane's party occupied a large center table, that Lamson and Mrs. Albans sat off in a corner, and that Agnes, by way of flaunting her regard for Glen, insisted on a table not far from her lover.

Thane, after ordering champagne, swaggered over to Lamson. "Frank," he called, "put 'er there."

The thick, blond, bristling Lamson took the proffered hand. "Sit down," he said. "Guess you know Mrs. Albans."

Thane smiled at his only woman customer. "Old friends," he agreed.

Lamson, after skirting the room with his eye, queried, "Tha', that Glynn woman over at your table—hasn't she been tryin' to pump me?"

"You got no kick comin'," Pardway replied. "Tell you what. You go on over and talk to Elsa Glynn. And let's see how much Mrs. Albans can get outa me."

Lamson rose. "I'll take you up on it," he said.

Ten minutes later Agnes noted that Thane was holding hands with the dark, elegant, sumptuously gowned woman whose eyes glowed across the room.

"Glen!" Agnes exclaimed, "will you dance with me?"

She was flaunting her regard for Swazie.

CHAPTER XXVII

DANIEL TAKES A HAND

IT was about this time that Daniel Pardway got it into his head that things weren't as they used to be in Tha's life. In order to confirm his suspicions, he plied Emaline Brown with questions concerning Agnes. And the wily housekeeper, by saying nothing—told him everything he wanted to know.

Subsequently, Daniel made it his business to corner Agnes, and take her to lunch.

He did not say much. Nor did she. But when they parted, it was understood that she was Thane's mistress, that Daniel was her ally, that he would plead her cause with his brother.

Daniel, having decided to "take a hand," dropped in at his brother's office. He came to the point immediately, saying he knew how matters stood, it was a damned shame, Thane was a skunk.

"Yah," the broker assented slowly, "reckon I am. Still I don't see as you've got any call to take me down. Not so holy yourself." He was referring to his brother's recent entanglement.

"Different proposition," Daniel snapped. "And you know it. Dorothy Irwin wasn't any more innocent than a—well, anyway. You know damn well it isn't the same thing."

Thane nodded. "Grant you that, Danny. And if you're all set makin' a man outa me—go ahead."

"You ought to marry that girl," Daniel pronounced severely.

"Yep. I reckon I ought."

"Well, when are you going to do it?"

Thane rubbed his finger over one of the ivory inlays in his desk. "I ain't agoin' do it."

"Why not?"

"I guess this won't make sense to you," Thane stated slowly. "But I ain't goin' do it because she can't make me."

"You see, Danny, there's only one thing in the world I respect. Force. And if she could only act up, rave around, sorta make me marry her—I would. I'd be glad to. I never thought more of a woman than I do of her."

"Well then—"

"Just keep quiet and hear me out," Thane admonished. "You know, Danny, I'm really sorry she's so damn good. But she's too decent to stoop to any stunts to get me married to her." He sighed. "I guess that's why I won't."

"Well, I like that!" Daniel exclaimed. "That's the reward for decency, eh?"

Thane's stubborn frown moved over his large face. "It's tough," he granted. "But then, lots of things are tough. I can't help it. I can't go through life with a woman who's a drag around my neck. And that's the way she'd be. And in the end she wouldn't be any happier. First time I laid eyes on a smart, independent up-and-coming woman—I'd be chasin' her."

He paused in sober contemplation. "Guess the only thing that holds me to her now is that I ain't married to her. I sorta feel the sacrifice she's making for me. But if we were married—in a month I'd be after some woman with a spirit like a bucking broncho. Cause that's the way I like 'em."

"Just a lot of talk that's neither here or there," Daniel replied. "She's a damn fine girl. And love you? Why—Lord! Furthermore, you like her. That's why you ought to marry her."

"Wouldn't do any good, Danny. She'd have to be very different before I could—"

"Change her," the merchant proposed. "Seems to me you've certainly made a big change in her as it is! Don't see why you can't go on."

Thane studied the ceiling for several minutes. "I've tried to change her," he said. "Took her here and there. Talked to her. Tried to make her be—" He shook his head. "Didn't do any good. Can't change people, Danny."

"Why with Agnes—at times I felt as if I had my hands in a mess of dough. And I pushed it into one shape. And then another. But the stuff, Danny, it was just the same." His head dipped into a profound, self-appreciative nod. "No matter what the shape," he repeated, "the stuff is the same." He rose, and said, "Have a cigar?"

Daniel sniffed and gazed thoughtfully into space. Then, "There may be something to what you say," he admitted. "But the way you say it makes me want to punch your face."

Thane smiled his fat, lush smile. "Lots of fellahs like that," was his comment. "They're all invited to try it." He nodded his head aggressively, stuck his thumbs under his vest, and striding up and down, began to talk about the wheat.

Funny, Daniel thought as he left the office of Thane Pardway & Co., the way his brother could put things so's it was hard to get away from them. Wouldn't marry the girl because she couldn't make him do it. Hm. Sort of interesting. And yet, wasn't the point. Just like Tha'. Could make the wrong side of any question look more—

Hm. Thought Agnes couldn't make him marry her, eh? Well, maybe Tha' had another guess coming.

Daniel rubbed his hands in a businesslike fashion, and set out for the Wabash Avenue house.

An hour later he went back to his store, telling himself that he had trimmed Tha's sails. Seemed as though Agnes

was of a fair mind to do as he said. And he said to get Tha', and get him good and plenty.

As a consequence of Daniel's meddling, there was a clash in the Wabash Avenue household.

Thane, in gossiping about world wheat conditions, said, "There's cinch-bug in the Argentine."

She made no reply.

"Cinch-bug does a lot of harm," he rambled on, wanting to seem companionable. "The farmers have to waste their time with the hopperdozer. Sort of too bad. I feel sorry for the farmers." He looked at her. What was ailing her, he wondered. "Say, Pet, I said—I feel sorry for the farmers."

Her eyes held a probing skepticism.

"Say, Ag, what's the matter?"

"O—nothing."

"What's the matter?" he insisted. "Don't you believe me?"

"Thane, you can make me believe anything."

"That so?" He was trying to seem innocent of her dismay. "I never knew that."

Again her long, probing glance.

"What's the matter, Aggy?"

"There isn't anything the matter," she replied, the tremulous quaver of her voice mocking her words. "It's just queer to hear you say you're sorry for anything."

"Yah? Why you don't know me, Aggy. Times are, I'm so sorry for people I could—"

"What?" she demanded.

"Say! Look here!" he called. "You got anything against me?"

After several starts, she answered, "I couldn't hold anything against you, Tha'."

Yes, he said to himself, if you weren't so damn forgiving—you'd come off better.

"Haven't you noticed," she was saying, "haven't you noticed that I'm not very happy?"

"Yah? What's the matter? You and Glen—not gettin' on so good?"

No answer.

Still no answer.

Then, "I always knew you were cruel." Silence. "But to think—" Her soft sobbing. "How could you?" she crooned. "How could you?"

"I don't know! What's more, stop cryin'! That only gets my dander up. I get so sore when these women start bawlin' that I—" And he swaggered up and down, working himself into a rage.

He was not angry at her. His wrath was really directed at himself because he had been so brutal, because he had no other means of coping with the situation.

Had she flared up now, had she asserted herself—he might have been her remorseful slave. But instead, she forgave him, saying that she knew he didn't mean it, that she shouldn't have spoken to him when he was concerned with the wheat—all of which, because of his intrinsic hatred of flinching, only infuriated him.

And to further calm him, she detailed her talk with Daniel, ending up with, "He told me to try and *make* you marry me, Tha'. But I can't! I can't!"

"Why not?" he barked. "Why ain't you got some of—of what any slut has? Just—"

Her pale, tear-blotted face turned up to him. "I can only love you, Thane," she sobbed. "I can't make you do anything. I know that. I've tried. I've tried to make you stop swearing. I've tried to make you stop wanting me. I tried to keep you from me." And in a rage of helplessness, she flung her head into her hands, crying, "I can't. I can't! I can only love you."

"Not enough!" was his verdict. "That's not enough!"

Something of the hopelessness of her position tugged at his heart. But he managed to overcome this twinge of sym-

pathy. He was sorry that Agnes had been unable to carry the fight to him. His feelings were a compound of contempt and chagrin. She had robbed him of a good fight—something he found hard to forgive.

He strode into the hall, slammed a gray derby down on his head, and went out walking.

Perhaps it was a hang-over of his surliness with Agnes, perhaps it was the natural outgrowth of his egoistic purpose—at any rate, Thane affronted B. P. Hutchinson that evening.

An hour after he had left the house, he was standing up to the Great Northern bar, pouring glass after glass into himself. Hutchinson, standing off to the side, noted that 'Big Tha' wasn't particularly companionable. Nevertheless, he decided to tackle him, and sauntered up to the bar with his twaddling, "Howdy! Haven't seen you so thirsty in a dog's age. What's the matter, Tha'? Haven't you any bottom?"

Thane's retort was a brash, "Who wants to know?" He fixed the old man with a crafty eye. "Don't worry 'bout me bein' tanked. If you got anythin' to say—out with it."

"Well, sir, what about getting together, sometime soon, on our first operations?"

Thane reached for the bottle and muttered, "Aw, go to hell."

But the old man was not easily shaken off. "You're drunk," he mumbled, wondering if 'Big Tha' himself were talking—or was it the whisky? "I'd like to ask you something," he ventured. "If there's a meeting of our side at my home shortly—will you attend?"

"Our side?" Thane growled. "What do you mean, our side? You playin' marbles, or somethin'?"

"No, no," the banker higgled. "You see, I've been talking to Ream and Brega and Billy Linn and some of the others. They're going to support me when we bear the

market. I thought I could count on you to be among them."

Pardway scowled at his image in the mirror. "The hell you say!" And without a parting glance, he stonily marched out of the bar.

Daniel's "hand" had become a long arm that was trifling with Thane's chances in The Pit.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MATTERS OF THE HEART

AGNES could no longer tolerate the thought of her love being denied. Her love! O, what unholy sweetness for which she had forsaken all. And Thane, her seducer, was dampening the very outlaw flame he had kindled in her heart.

Her immersion in the foul stew of remorse and defilement lent a dark color to her days. She was pervaded with a dank, chilling rapture. Ah, she thought, his scheming and trickery had made her a distraught fiend. Now that she was no better than he—she would pay him back in kind.

All the sweetness and love she had lavished upon him soured under his scorn. It was terrible, she reflected, to get him to marry her by means fair or foul. But still, if it could be accomplished—

He had taken advantage of her goodness. Perhaps she could work upon his villainy. He was proud and possessive. She would prod him into an angry desire for her by— By sending Glen to him!

That evening, as Swazie avowed his love for the hundredth time, she said, "Glen, I'll marry you if Mr. Pardway gives his consent. But you'll have to ask him. He's my guardian, and—"

Glen wanted to enfold her. But she shook her head and stayed him with her outstretched hands.

"Sure!" he cried, remembering Thane's friendliness. "I'll ask him. He can't refuse. And Aggy dear, I love you. And—"

Those items upon which money is spent only in order to inspire a general respect for one's wealth and good-

fellowship—are more costly than any others. But despite Thane's vast expenditures, by 1887, almost against his will, he had amassed a personal fortune of something like a half a million dollars.

He could not marshal all this money at one sweep. However, for purposes of exigency, he kept a standing army of "one hundred thousand iron men" in Chicago banks—half of it at the Chippewa National, and the remainder divided between Gottschalk's Hamburg-American and Voss' Columbia Trust. And there were the militia of negotiable stocks and bonds to the value of two hundred thousand dollars in the normal market. And several parcels of real estate, all in likely neighborhoods, which Thane had bought as a gambler buys his diamonds—for purposes of hypothecation when the luck went wrong. He ought to be able to slap second mortgages on these, he figured. That would give him an additional hundred thousand. And should he still need money—there were his memberships in the various exchanges. But these, he decided, he would not sell unless he was fighting back-to-the-wall.

As was usually the case with him, he wanted to operate on the money of others. To share control or direction—not he! But profits—he was perfectly willing to split profits. True enough, there mightn't be any profits—but a man never got anywhere looking at things that way.

Otis, Gottschalk and Voss, he hoped, would come in with him. And perhaps he could round up a number of the more important Pitmen. And there were some of his large customers, always ready to put funds at his disposal. At present, he felt, he couldn't go to those men. For he didn't dare breathe a word of his projects—at least, not until the Lamson-Kershaw-Albright-Rosenfeld crowd came into the open. For the time being there was only one man he could safely approach—his brother.

Thane picked up his hat and sauntered over to The BAZAAR.

Daniel Pardway rubbed his long, beaked nose. His gray-blue eyes slowly took in his brother. "Ought to get married," he snapped. "Then you wouldn't be coming around with a button off your coat."

Thane laughed. Then shoving a cigar into his mouth, he remarked, "Danny, you and I have made a lot of money. Among others, guess you remember Lyon's Corner in '72. Broke from 181 to 109. And we were ridin' down nearly every notch."

Daniel made a clicking noise, followed by, "More luck'n sense."

"How's that? No need to talk that way, Dan'l. Now listen to me."

For over an hour Thane held forth, outlining his preparations for the coming corner. He wound up by saying, "Now I'm goin' after 'em, see? And if I'm goin' batter 'em down to bed rock, if I'm goin' sell 'em short as Little Egypt's skirts, if I'm goin' smash 'em to hell—I need the means! No scrip, shin-plasters or wooden money, see? But real money—that's what I'll need."

"Yes, I guess you will," Daniel admitted dryly. "Where you going to get it?"

Thane blinked. "How's that?" The pale ends of his lips streaked down his stony chin. "No way for you to talk, Dan'l! Why I've made awful big money for you. I set you on your feet, I did. I took the bit in the mouth and made plungers outa galley slaves."

Daniel nodded.

"Then don't go askin' me where I'll get money when I need it!" came Thane's throaty admonition. "You! To ask me where I'm goin' to get it! Why—where the hell do you s'pose?" He rose, and stood towering over his brother. "Where'll I get it, eh? Well, I'm goin' get it from you!"

Daniel bit off the end of a cigar. "That's news to me, Tha'. But I'm much obliged to you for telling me what I'm going to do. I'd also be much obliged to you—if you and your crazy schemes took a walk."

"Aw—you piker!" Thane growled. He was disappointed and disgusted. Still he told himself, there was no use raving on. Right now it wasn't imperative to get Danny in. Better seem to take the turn-down easy-like. And with a simulated yawn, he observed, "Well, I guess you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip—" and marched out.

He stamped back to his office through a flurry of damp snow. "A king or a bum!" he kept muttering to himself, "I'm goin' be a king or a bum!"

This mystic mumbo-jumbo was music to his epileptic ego.

Thane Pardway was in no happy mood when Swazie's card was sent into him. Still, he thought, no use taking it out on the pup. See what he wanted, and be decent to him.

"How's the boy?" he called, extending his hand.

After ten minutes of conversational see-sawing, Glen noted that Pardway was becoming rather impatient. "I'll tell you what I came for," he blurted. "Agnes says she'll marry me if you give your consent. And I could give her a good home. And—"

"How's that?" Thane's ears were tingling. What the hell was this? Agnes—marry Swazie? And this talk about consent. Why did she want consent? Must be more to this than appeared on the surface. "Short notice," he grumbled, "awful short notice."

For a moment he felt an angry storm rising within him. So! This young whippersnapper would take her away from him, eh? Christ! Why couldn't she have picked out a regular fellow?

Glen was rambling on about how he loved her, how he would provide for her—

Pardway, hardly listening, was trying to pierce the matter to its heart. His thoughts revolved about the notion of consent. Consent, consent?

Then he saw. Wanted to hurt him, did she? Well, he'd show her.

"Young fellah," he rumbled, "this is awful sudden. You know, I don't object to your trottin' Agnes around. But marryin' her—that's another thing."

"Why, Mr. Pardway! I thought you liked me! You even promised to ask her for me—" A heavy anguish foundered about Swazie's shallow eyes. He looked sad and waxy.

"Ask her for you," Thane echoed, "ask her for you!" He was talking against time. "Well, you don't want much. Not that I wouldn't do it—mind, if I had good reason. It ain't that I hold anything against you, m'boy. It's just that I have to look out for Agnes. Gotta do my duty by her. Show me you're an up-and-comin' fellah! Show me—"

Glen was taken unawares. Why, why—what was the matter with him? He had great hopes. Some day there would be a partnership with Lamson & Biggers—

Won't be any Lamson & Biggers once I get going, Thane told himself. "How old're you?" he demanded.

"Thirty-one."

"Why when I was thirty-one! Know where I was? Why I was goin' some, I was. Betcha sweet life! Why I'd been around the world. I'd run cotton up through the Underground Railway! I'd—"

After listening meekly, Glen declared, "I'm going to do a lot of things."

Thane glowered, and let loose a booming, "When?"

"Well, I don't know—"

"That's it, m'boy! That's the trouble with fellahs like you. Nothin' to 'em!" Thane left his desk and tramped up and down. "Now I got no more time to waste on this foolishness. I don't give any consent. And if you've got the gumption, you'll do without it. And what's more," he added, not wanting to seem so crushingly antagonistic, "I don't forbid you the house. I don't even hold anything against you. Only—where did you ever tend bar?"

"And if you've got it in you, as you say you have,

you'll carry off the girl no matter what an old copperhead like me says." He picked up a handful of papers. "G'day."

As Thane plodded through the December snow, he was wondering if he might use the carriage he had bought for Agnes. Wasn't any doubt about it, she'd never step into it. And still, better wait.

Agnes was working in the library when he entered. "How's she goin'?" he inquired, brushing the flakes off his derby.

"There's a shrinking in the United States' visible supply," she reported. "I don't think it's serious, though. It's probably due to the annual adjustment after the close of Lake navigation. The cargoes are transferred to Georgian Bay and other Canadian ports, aren't they?"

He nodded. Certainly was getting wise on the wheat. Pity to lose her now, just when she would be so valuable. "Your friend Swazie was in to see me this afternoon," he said. "Guess you know what about."

There was a strained silence.

"Well?" she finally countered.

"Well, I told him I had objections."

After a minute she asked, "Why do you object to him?"

"Don't object to him. Just don't want him to marry you."

It was one of those interludes rising out of painful conflict, that does not seem to find any climactic point, that winds in and out of hours like a subterranean stream, rarely coming to the surface.

No more was said till after dinner. And then Agnes put a question. "Would you object to any one else?"

"Sure. Sure I would. I ain't goin' let anybody marry you."

She went to the piano. The slow, sorrowful chords of Handel crashed through the gloom.

Thane, picking up her summary of the week's primary

grain movements, prepared to check over the sum total. But his attention was distracted by her playing. He felt that the sweet, heavy, brooding of the largo was being flayed by her angry hands.

And still, he asked himself, why did that matter to him? Music? He didn't care for music. And yet—somehow he did. Since—ever since that night her flame-wrapped body had been a bridge into the beyond. Ever since her lost soul had been wandering about in his consciousness—
“Stop banging!” he shouted.

What difference did it make to him, he asked himself, if she banged? And yet— Ah! Now he understood why she had been unable to go when he gave her the chance. The more she struggled against the net—the more it entwined her. And now—the more he tried to get away from that spiritual softness—

Of what avail that he was working himself free of the physical fascination of this pale woman—if he were to be caught up in the toils of her soul?

“You won't marry me!” she cried. “And yet you want to keep some one else from marrying me—”

Thane Pardway was too strong a man, of too fixed a purpose to be undone—even by his own thoughts. At her attack he immediately pulled himself together. “Yah!” He snarled. “What're you goin' do about it?”

His attitude had been thoroughly unlooked for. She had feared that he might have seized upon Glen as a possible solution. It had been very difficult for her to face that. But she could understand, even condone, any such indifference. But for him to dispassionately discard her, and on top of that—

“You mean to tell me,” she demanded, a measure of the harshness she had learned from him creeping into her insistence, “you mean to tell me that if I love Glen Swazie, and he wants to marry me—that you'll prevent it?”

Something tugged at his heart. The very words “if I love Glen Swazie” rankled in him. He was about to tell

her that she was a fool, that she didn't love Swazie, that she couldn't love him. But he desisted, feeling that he must not retreat.

"Yes," he declared angrily, "that's what I mean to tell you. Come what may, I'll never let any man marry you." He swept a sheaf of papers into a pile before him. "And what's more," he growled, "I don't wanna be bothered. Anything you have to say will wait. I'm busy."

Busy! It was true. Every moment now, the great legend of the wheat was whispering away at him. "Somewhere in the world wheat is seeding—somewhere in the world wheat is growing—somewhere in the world wheat is being harvested—"

A thousand motivations, men, principles, factors, fancies and possibilities marched in grim masquerade about his mind. And the whole reserve of his slumbering potentialities as Pitman, organizer, money machine, politician and goodfellow shouted frantic assurance into his heart.

As quickly as possible he would have to familiarize himself with all the intricate currents and under-currents of the great wide world of the wheat. After all, the whole chaotic cosmos of the corner involvement swung on just one axis—the visible supply. From this day on he would have to know, weeks, even months, in advance, just what the visible supply would be. And then he would have to make alliances with what dependable bears were not yet in Hutchinson's fold. And if possible—patch up a peace with the old buzzard. For if Hutch had Ream and Brega and fellows like that in tow—they were too powerful to be neglected. And he had to direct his whole world of espionage and mischief-making—not in Chicago alone, but in Cincinnati, and in California where his agents were watching a man named Flagler and a local wheat situation which might eventually influence the world market, and in New York, where agents were reporting on the National

City Bank crowd who were friendly to Flagler, and—Holy smoke!

There was no one to whom he could turn over the slightest part of this burden. Agnes was not much of a help. For one thing, even if she were to do her work perfectly these days, that was not enough. Each set of the hundreds of sets of figures suggested its own group of puzzling possibilities. So even if her mathematics happened to be correct—her conclusions might be misleading.

But it seemed, these days, that he could not even depend upon her for mathematical accuracy. She who had been so eager to assume the burden of this work was now disinterested, slipshod, and once in a while, negligent.

“What’s the matter?” he inquired, not unkindly, upon noting a gross error in her export balance. “You so taken up with your concert that you can’t get this straight?”

Concert? The word sounded strange to her. She realized that she had not practiced for days.

“Yes,” she said. Why couldn’t she tell him the real reason, she asked herself. Why shouldn’t she say that for the last few weeks she had been unable to concentrate? Why shouldn’t she say that she didn’t care? Why couldn’t she admit that now that he was discarding her for the wheat— She was unwilling to serve in any capacity that helped take him from her. Why—

“You don’t love me,” she said.

He was thinking that he’d have to get on as best he could. If she wouldn’t do the work—he would. No use trying to replace her. Things were becoming too complicated for a novice.

“How’s that?”

“If you loved me,” she declared, “you’d marry me!”

“I will if you can make me.”

Could he get Leopold Bloom in with him? Could Felix Lassmann swing Bloom his way? And if it got out that Bloom was hooked up with him—would George Otis stand by? George, for all that he was a genial soul, didn’t like

Jews. And if he patched up his differences with Hutch—would George still come across? George didn't like Hutch. And Carl Gottschalk had recently had a tiff with Cornelius Voss. Could he hold those two together? His own purposes required—

"I suppose Mrs. Albans could make you marry her!" Agnes exclaimed angrily.

Well, this was a new one! How the hell—"Don't bother about Mrs. Albans," he replied quietly. By golly, they were all alike. Any other woman was poison to 'em.

Anyway there were a host of men, moneyed institutions, interlocking directorates, conflicting likes, ambitions and passions—all of which he must organize, inspire, hold sway over—

"You don't love me!" she insisted.

Love! By golly! At such a time—love! Seemed like they didn't know any other word.

He rose and took her in his arms. "Don't worry about that," he said. "You can't never always tell."

CHAPTER XXIX

INQUISITION INTO THE PASSIONS

A PALE young woman with an ineffectual pathos had appealed to Thane Pardway. For a while she had stood between him and the great shining sun of his ambition. But now, after this eclipse of the world of the wheat, he was again fully conscious of it, fully conscious and compelled, forced by the very egotistic foment in his blood to surge relentlessly toward the strife and fury of The Pit.

Every nerve, every fiber of this man was aflame with his one grand passion—the impulse to power through his preëminence in the world of the wheat. This was the basic motivation of the man, the juggernaut Jacobinism which had exhausted itself in the skirmishes of years gone by, and was now beginning to reassert itself. This was the one ruling passion in contrast to which any temporary desire for a woman—was whirled away by the maelstrom of mighty and overwhelming forces which descended upon him.

For it was the wheat that was his real mistress, the wheat which lured him by the fascination of her world-wide wantonness, the wheat to whom he paid court with the craft and cunning of his inflamed ego, the wheat which held him in indissoluble union by her eternal challenge to his unending vanity, his fierce necessity for dominance, his grandiose craving for mastery. It was the wheat to whom he now returned, loverly and penitent, after philandering for several years with a number of women. He went back as an errant and eager mate seeks his eternal mistress,

knowing by the very stirring of his sap that she is the one fascination from which he can never be free.

Little of this occurred to him. He felt, suddenly, that Agnes was a rather vague and unaccountable presence.

Yet he remembered, indeed he remembered, that this shadow and he— Well, let's see now. What was all this?

Yes, there was a woman who had been very much in love with him. Why didn't he care about her? Well, there were a number of reasons. He had to be sneaky about it, and get servants out of the house, and the like. Not that he minded being sneaky—but with servants! And then, even when they were alone, she wanted to *talk* about it. The whole relationship had been unsatisfactory.

For one thing, he had paid off his other women lavishly, and called it quits. But with Agnes, his presents had been worse than nothing. There was no payment he could make to her. She had given him the great gift of herself—and he was hardly grateful. It was mean, he told himself, mean. After all these years in which he had flung largesse about, this simple girl had somehow put herself in a position where he could only be her debtor.

And he had always been a giver, rarely a taker. And she had turned the tables! It was a bitter pill to swallow. For it indicated the high, frantic passion of the girl, her mad sincerity which had made her a fixed star in a firmament of nebulous females. No, he had never had a chance of making a common kept woman out of her. In a manner, he had failed with her. He never should have trifled with her! Their affair had been a series of blunders from the start.

Failure! The thought was intolerable to this man.

A stirring wrath was rising up within him, the wrath of the strong who feel themselves beholden to the weak, a blinding, self-excoriating wrath—the only escape from which lay in turning its full emotional force upon the unfortunate person who had inspired it. Once more he rehashed his disdain of Agnes or any other person who

never could command a situation. It was all her fault anyway! She should have held him off! If she was so damned good—why the hell didn't she show it when the time came?

All through the course of these contemptuous ranklings, he realized that it was her very bodilessness, helplessness, frailty, that had entranced him. And a deep sympathy for her welled up in him, fed his voracious vanity by making him feel that he was sorrier for her—than she was for herself. And yet, he hated being sorry for her. It undermined him. All his strength went to support her own weak position.

Now the practical side of him asserted itself against this jumbled inquisition into the passions. Well, there had to be a solution.

Swazie! Hm, Swazie.

Heretofore, there had only been a vague notion about the boy. Now it seemed to him that he must settle upon Swazie—or some one else.

And hardly aware of what was going on in him, he began to search about for some justification.

Ah—it would be better for her! A younger man. Who loved her. Who would marry her.

And so he sat for hours, turning the matter over in his mind.

For the first time in his life he did not know what was motivating him. Was it for her good that he was turning from her—or for his? He could not tell. Her spiritual grace had called forth that soul quality—that soul quality which unsettled a mind unaccustomed to such questioning.

He took refuge in anger, telling himself that if she hadn't been so damned good she'd have come off better, that if she had been physically eager rather than emotionally wild, she could still have had him. Anyway, how was he to care about a girl like that when a woman like Zena Albans had come into his life?

Two very sad things were happening to Thane Pardway.

He was becoming a dispassionate rake. His conscience was finding him out.

How like the bravura mood of the man are his chambers, Father Dion is saying to himself. And with what massive, imperturable grace the old sinner moves.

It is a very unusual situation. He must outface this worldly man. And not be resentful or righteous. On the contrary, he must be courtly and bland. And smoke cigars. And seem to be something of a sinner himself. And mildly, most mildly, suggest his mission—

Thane listened politely. Then, "There's no use beatin' around the bush," he brayed. "I seduced the girl. Call me a dirty dog, and let's get this over with."

Might one suggest that a priest is not bowled over by such matters? That they lend whatever color there is to his days? That really, Mr. Pardway's indiscretion is quite popular?

What the hell was ailing this fellow, Pardway wondered. No thunder and brimstone. Just talked human-like. Agnes, apparently, had gone to him and confessed. And he was really trying to help the girl.

"Say," he said, "you're a good sport, Father. But lemme ask you something. Aren't you supposed to hold confessions in absolute confidence? Not that I'm accusin' you, mind. Just asked outa curiosity."

"Your brother's coming to me, Mr. Pardway, is responsible for my being here."

So! Danny was talking out of turn. Well, he'd make that seem pretty cheap. "Tell you, Father. You needn't think that brother o' mine is so holy because he came pussyfootin' around to you. Many's the man that seems to be doin' somebody a good turn, but is really acting outa selfish interest."

He threw the priest an owl-like stare. Huh! A pretty put-up man, no doubt of it. Did he really keep away from women, and all? And if he did—why?

"You see," Thane went on, "Danny owns The BAZAAR. And a big store like that, why it needs credit. And in this community of holy men, it's hard to get credit if you don't walk the straight and narrow. My playin' ducks and drakes sorta reflects on him. So you see—"

Might one remind Mr. Pardway of an interview with his brother? His brother—who boasts of buying for cash, and selling for cash!

Thane chuckled. "Well, you caught me, Father. Now come on. What do you want me to do? Marry her?"

"Yes. Marry her."

So, Thane said to himself, this fellah was really a wolf in sheep's clothing. He was one of the deniers, one of the excoriators and inquisitors of all free-flowing feeling, of all splurges of self-satisfaction, of all those individualistic surgings which made one feel strong. This man represented the conventionally cold eyes of Daniel Pardway, the pursed lips of Emaline Brown, the knowing austerity of Henry Cullom, the frozen-faced righteousness of Agnes Weatherly in indignation, the smiling sophistication of Judge Brechtenhauer—this man represented the whole vast world of the weak and those who were willing to abide by the conventions that safeguarded the weak from their own weak impulses.

"Ain't goin' marry her!" he barked. "Because I don't give a damn for her!"

The ground slips from under one's feet. One says something. It sounds metaphysical and most immaterial. Something . . . something . . . something about giving her the opportunity to lead a happier life, to meet some young man who may care for her and marry her.

"Well," Thane grumbled, "I promise you I will. There's a young fellah named Swazie who likes her. Might be all for her good."

Father Dion went on his way. For a while his vision of an eternal present had been distorted. What a mad, bad world it was. Somehow he felt himself at fault. The

man Pardway was so interesting in some respects—that it was difficult to dislike him.

Thane, at his office, recalled his promise. He could not help laughing. It was a haunting, brutal snicker of a laugh, evoked by the thought of all the mean things people do for another's good.

How brief, how ephemeral Agnes Weatherly's glimpse of the heights of passion had been. For a few months the chimera of a warm world of materiality had whirled about her. And then everything became cold, cold as this Christmas dawn in Chicago when she knelt in shivering supplication before the silver crucifix.

In the last few days she and Thane had come to a tacit, unspoken understanding that their affair was at an end. He found some reason for withdrawing Emaline Brown from Daniel's service. He no longer maneuvered to get Henry Cullom out of the house. And he no longer attempted to prevail upon Agnes, to outwit her, to hold sway over her. If anything, he was much more friendly than ever.

His kindness was terrible to her. It represented the last rites for a dead love. His words held an occasional, distant softness, the softness of a requiem. His moments of sad, profound solemnity were like an extreme unction. And then his kindness became uncaring—the pall for a dead passion.

And still, she told herself, she was not entirely forsaken. She was fairly certain that no other woman had taken her place. It was the wheat. Perhaps, she hoped, after the corner had come and gone—perhaps then his eyes would seem to see her when she entered the room.

But suppose—suppose this did not happen? What would she do? There was the ever pressing problem of Glen Swazie. Swazie who cared for her. Swazie who wanted her to be his wife. Could she marry him?

Never! She loved Thane. She belonged to him. Her

association with him seemed to have outlawed her, to have placed her beyond the pale of marriage to a young man like Swazie. As she sank into the quicksand of her predicament, a harsh, mocking laughter shook her. It was a variation of the laughter she had so often heard from Thane. It had its origin in one of those curious, contrary, viciously cruel thoughts that so often made Thane laugh. Here she was, she told herself, not too good or too holy to be Thane Pardway's mistress. And yet, essentially too decent to marry Swazie because she did not love him.

Swamped by dismay as she was, only one thought gave her grasp. The concert! It was only a few days off. Perhaps if she strained every fiber—

Thane, in ways uniquely subtle for him, attempted to inflame her regard for Swazie. He was singularly unsuccessful. What was it, he wondered. Had he lost his power to evoke a response? Wasn't likely. Anyway, all she did was sing and sing.

Then came the concert.

He sat through four sets of numbers rendered by Madame Cecile's pupils, sat heavy and dolorous, wondering about the wheat, and stealing side-long glances at Swazie's blond cheeks, at the small, boyish mustache, at those nice hollow eyes.

Suddenly some electric agony shot through him. What the hell was this? Agnes? Singing like that! Why, by golly! She had some notes that struck into his heart like the sharpest steel. And at that, her voice was unusually strident and raspy. But it only seemed to enhance her singing, to give it a deep emotional tensi-ty.

Thane Pardway knew nothing of the coloratura range, of the bird quality that seems to sing out of a vacuous despair if the artist has a cold, of the phonetic phenomenon of the bird warble shrilly soaring above the brass.

He only knew that unexpectedly he had been caught up by the hoarse fervor of her flurried emotions. That settled

it! He had a great soprano on his hands. He'd ship her off to Europe!

He was truly happy for her. He, too, saw in her singing an escape from the placid Swazie.

Up to this time, everything in their association had been the outgrowth of very natural consequences. Now chance and rank misfortune took their toll. At one stroke, the avenue of escape was closed.

This came about in the following way. Agnes had sorely tried her vocal chords in her hasty preparations. After the concert she went to bed, first opening the window. A chill, damp wind blew over her as she lay dreaming.

It was a long, rambling dream about Thane and Henry Cullom. In it she reviewed a number of scenes of her association with them.

She had never liked the butler. All along she had resented his close communion with Thane. There was something between them, she knew, something that had to do with Thane's saving the colored man's life. Neither of them would speak about it. Mrs. Brown had told her this and that.

There were times when the evening had no program. And she would say, "Thane, do let me read to you." Or suggest the theater, music, a lecture—trying always to evolve some mutuality with him. But more than often he would disregard her, call the butler, and mumble, "Sit down, Henry. Let's have a game of chess."

In her dream she saw Thane playing with the negro. Then the two of them shook hands. Slowly, the color left the darker hand, and flowed through Thane's fingers.

Now the black figure of her lover was grinning at her. Then he came toward her, his black hands reaching for her throat.

She awoke, screaming. Her throat was hot and throbbing. Her mouth was full of blood.

The next morning a physician told her that she had torn a number of ligaments.

After a few days she tried the scales. Her voice faltered. When she forced it there was a stormy screech.

Specialists held out no hope. Thane called more specialists. They upheld the previous opinions. Nothing, they said, could be done about it. It was too bad. Miss Weatherly should compose herself, and turn her thoughts to other things.

Agnes regarded her awesome dream and its frightful consequences as the visitation of an Almighty vengeance. She decided to steel herself for an ordeal. She must go to Father Dion and confess everything.

This visitation was not the only factor in deciding her. She was beginning to feel the barrenness of her life with Thane Pardway. Only at the height of her infatuation had there been some satisfying sensuality, some tantalizing sense of sin and shame that closed her consciousness to all else. But the fever of her love had passed. She was no longer possessed by a dream delirium in which she saw herself as an unholy abomination. Hers was merely a drab, bitter state in which not only Thane's regard, but her own interest in herself had lapsed.

To fully appreciate what was going on in Agnes, one must understand that passion is the poetry of the body. Its advent, blooming, full flowering, and fading—is a lyrical counterpart of our physical waxing and waning.

There were moments in which Agnes could not help reviewing the passion process she had undergone. There was that budding, pubertal state of terror and anticipation. There was the yielding languor of her love's adolescence. And the womanly abandonment to his first possessive seizures. And then her impregnation with his stampeding power. And the few weeks in which she felt swollen and full of him. And the after-delivery emptiness. And now the beholding of the bluish, still-born pain, the still-born

pain that was the only fruit of their passion, the still-born pain that she must enter in the graveyard of the years, the still-born pain brought forth in the birth pangs of penance.

And so she went to the Cathedral of the Holy Name and poured forth her heart. It was not as harrowing as she had imagined. And after it was all over, she sat silent and shaken amid the cool stones. A heavy, healing sorrow was swabbing her aching throat.

Now she recalled some of the most tender, some of the most terrible phrases ever written. 'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Ah, the wages of her sin had been death, the death of the greatest dream she had ever dreamed. And yet, through the goodness of God, she had entered into some new sanctification. Was it not written, 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'

But however worthy this transfiguration, she still suffered the dull sorrows of the material world. She had lost Thane's love. Nothing could come of Swazie's sweet friendship. And all those pleasant hours with Madame Cecile were over. And remembering the Psalms, she murmured to herself, "'Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.'"

CHAPTER XXX

BREAD ALONE

ONE night, when he was out walking, Thane halted before Mr. Orville Albright's Rush Street home.

Gee, how he hated that Albright fellah. Hated him like poison. Hated that high, glossy forehead, the long Roman nose, the deep cavernous eyes—hated all that tony Kentucky talk of the man! Albright had blackballed 'Big Tha' at Union Club, had he? And knocked him in society? And passed him by on the street without a howdy—black rust his soul!

Hot on the heels of this stormy rehearsal of his antipathy, came word from Rosa Duveyne to the effect that Mr. Albright was boasting of how he'd pickle that man Pardway in The Pit.

The next morning Thane decided to make his peace with 'Old Hutch.' He dropped into the Corn Exchange Bank, passed the time of the day, said he must have been under the weather when they last met—and went away non-plussed.

For the old man's eyes might have become a trifle less apathetic. And his face a little less soapy. And his voice less scrapy. But—he didn't seem to care. "Quite a number of strong men on my side," he remarked. "Glad to have you, Pardway, if you'll take orders."

Thane said he'd take orders, and asked what they were.

"Tell you when I'm ready," Hutchinson replied craftily, affixing a line from Hamlet, "'Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice.'"

Staying close to the wind, Thane reflected. Hutch was smart enough to know 'Big Tha' hadn't come to take

orders. Still, what was the old buzzard so cocky about? And who were his strong men?

He soon found out.

Nat Jones said he couldn't commit himself.

Billy Linn wasn't interested.

Alex Geddes thought it too early to plan any—

W. B. Ream had heard—

C. W. Brega thought the clique was too strong.

Charles Schwartz hinted at previous arrangements.

There were a bunch of full-rigged Pitmen, Thane told himself. And by the swordfish, they seemed hooked up to Old Hutch! None of 'em would admit it, but—

Well, the old buzzard had stolen a march on him!

For several minutes Thane Pardway was entirely flabbergasted. Then bit by bit the breath of arrogance came back to him. Didn't matter, he decided. Get along without those fellows.

But even so. Who was there left to him? Alton Beecher and Felix Lassmann. And Lassmann was more or less small-fry. Still, if Lassmann could hook Leopold Bloom—

But even so, he thought, they weren't much. No doubt of it, he'd have to hurry up and get more backing.

Thane considered the matter for a few minutes, and then set about raising money of his own. He took his hundred thousand "iron men" out of the vaults. He sold his negotiable stocks and bonds through Reed & Flagg of New York—not wanting any one connected with him to be aware of this liquidation. He transferred his real estate to Daniel, and had him take out mortgages on the various properties.

And then, carrying a carpet bag which held four hundred thousand dollars in cash, he walked into the Chippewa National, flung his burden down on the President's desk, and sang out, "George, how's that for a clean-up? Guess I'd like to open me some more accounts."

The banker's twinkling eyes lit up. He stroked his side-

whiskers and observed, "That's quite a pile. What's happened?"

"Just a little luck in The Pit," Thane replied. "And there's goin' be more where that came from."

"Well, well," Otis grumbled. "It's a wonder you wouldn't let a fellow in on it."

Under a somewhat similar set of circumstances, Thane appeared the following week at Gottschalk's Hamburg-American. "This is only a lick of what's comin'," he declared. "In the future George Otis and I divide the returns. Poor George. He might 'a' had half of this, only—"

And so Otis, Gottschalk and Cornelius Allerton Voss were snared into his net. "No use trying anything yet," he told them. "You'll have to wait till I give the word."

Now he felt he could approach his large customers. "Moses," he said to old Hemmingway, the street-car magnate, "I got these bankers in with me on a li'l proposition—"

Altogether, something like a half million dollars was pledged to him. And still, he reflected, he couldn't reap any sizeable profits on this outside money. And he wasn't going to use his own cash. Now then, where could he rake up a stake?

It occurred to him that in tracking down Henry Flagler, a Californian related to some of the Cincinnati freebooters—he had stumbled over a mess of curious conditions in the San Francisco wheat mart. Through the ensuing months, undoubtedly, the eyes of the world would be fastened on the Chicago Pit. Meanwhile, if 'Frisco conditions were somewhat aggravated—he might snatch a sizeable chunk of money out there.

Besides, he told himself, it wouldn't hurt to have a look around the country and see how things were. And while he was away, Agnes might drift back to Swazie.

It was the First of February, 1887, that Thane went to San Francisco.

. . .

Why Thane had disappeared, or where he had gone, Agnes did not know. He was away three weeks.

Meanwhile, her spiritual regeneration made her hope for some change in him. As soon as he was back, she began to criticize his great rumbling voice, his manner of swaggering about the house, that wave of the hand with which he waved others out of the world.

All this was entirely dismaying to Thane. She was still a squeamish, pernickety, tight-laced female, he reflected. Even when he had made a bad woman out of her, she couldn't give up reforming!

For a moment he thought of saying as much. Then he decided not to. He couldn't change her any more than she could change him. In the days when they were intimate he would have said it, just to stir her up, to get some fight up in her—so that he would have had something to batter down. But now it would just hurt her. Whatever he said to her these days sounded so heavy. His big, bulky words fell down to the floor with a boom.

Agnes mistook this protracted silence. She thought that some stirring remorse had clogged the flow of the disdainful, contemptuous, arrogant rebuttal she had expected. Now for the thousandth time she went through the paces of an ancient formula. If he were kinder to people, they would like him better. In the end he would be happier. It was wrong to go on living just for one's selfish interests. Happiness came only through making others happy.

As she spoke, he strode up and down the room, buttoning and unbuttoning his frock coat, sticking his large hands straight down into the square-cut pockets fronting his trousers. One hand jingled the dozens of coins always kept in readiness for tipping. The other jangled his many keys, the key to the house, to the office, to the stable, to his cupboards at the Union League, to Mrs. Albans' rooms—

Up and down he strode, superbly conscious of his steady, rhythmic pacing, a steady rhythmic pacing calculated to sweep Agnes up into his own emotional tempestuousness.

Up and down he strode, the creases under his armpits showing when he buttoned up that close-fitting coat. His face became red and puffy, not so much from the exertion of tramping back and forth, but from the angry effort of sending forth a tidal wave of silent wrath.

Once she would have been fearful of any such manifestation of his awesome might. She would have cowered, even cringed before him. But now, much as she was stirred, much as the insistent pounding of her heart responded to his furious pacing, the cool pool of her penitence was an oasis of calm.

"Thane," she said, "you're angry."

Up and down, he paced, up and down; buttoning and unbuttoning his coat, unbuttoning and buttoning; up and down . . . his smoldering eye sparkling in the gloom.

"'An angry man,'" she quoted, "'stirreth up strife. And a furious man aboundeth in transgression.'"

"You don't tell me!"

And then he marched on, wrathfully reminding himself that the wheat was on the rise. The wheat! The wheat with her world-wide wantonness! The wheat—unattainable, unpossessable! The wheat—whose golden-gray tresses were pouring into The Pit. Pouring in, wave on wave—and still those bulls were tampering with the prices!

Slowly, Agnes began to weaken. She was ashamed and awed by the massive, mobile might that churned about him. The love impulse which she tried to deny overcame her. For all that he had forsaken her, he was her man. And he was in need of some soothing grace that would be like oil poured on the waters of his stampeded soul.

"What is it?" she begged. "What's the trouble? Can't you tell me? Thane, dear, what's done all this?"

It seemed that he had to stop and think, that he hardly knew, that the great gushing torrent of his emotions had carried him—

"Thane, Tha' dear, what is it? What are you worked up about?"

"The wheat! Ran up two cents to-day!"

"But what does it matter? You're not ready to go into The Pit."

"Who—me? Why if I was in there," he demanded, "if I was in there, do you think they could 'a' put her up?"

"No, of course not," she agreed hurriedly, attempting to mollify him.

But that only seemed to make him angrier. "Why—you!" he snorted. "How do you know? Why if I was in that Pit—" His great, greedy hand snatched at her hair, spun her around the room. "Why if I was in The Pit I'd handle 'em like—like that." He released her. She fell back into a large chair. "I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't mean to hurt you."

After a few minutes she felt the storm was over. Perhaps she could remonstrate with him. "And for what, Thane, for what?" she asked. "Why must you go into The Pit? Why?"

"I gotta show 'em!"

"And suppose you don't, Tha'? Suppose you never have any more money than you have now? Suppose some one else becomes the most influential man in the market? Is that so terrible?"

And now he smiled, a ghastly, grim, gargoyle smile through which a silent, slimy disdain splashed out at her.

"Why, Thane? Why must you—?"

"I gotta show 'em."

"Show 'em what, Tha'? That you understand the market? They know that. And suppose they don't? Does that matter so much? What do you want to show 'em?"

He was caught in a mesh of those curious moralities human beings make for themselves. In the last few years he had been "showing 'em he could keep out of The Pit." And now—

"Got to show 'em I'm the boss over there!"

"You mean in The Pit, Thane?"

"In The Pit," he answered, "and elsewhere. In the whole world of the wheat. In the whole wide world of the wheat."

"But you've told me yourself that no man can do it."

"Me," he said, stabbing his index finger into his chest, "I can do it." More pacing. "A king or a bum—that's me. Gotta be one or the other. An' I've been a bum. A bum on bumboats all over the world. And I'm near fifty. And it's time I raised me up. And made me a king."

Fifty—she had somehow forgotten. "Thane, Thane, you mustn't! No man should want the power you're reaching out for. No man should have it. Think of everything you're sacrificing for it. When I first knew you, you were like any other human being. And now, day and night, the only thing you think of is the wheat, the wheat!" A shrill insistence began to cry out of her, "Do you ever think of those millions of people who've raised the grain you're going to fight over? Do you ever stop to think about the millions of people who're hungry for it? Thane!" she cried, "it isn't just money, or a woman. It's wheat, Tha'! It's bread! It's the staff of life!"

Hm! If she'd put up that much of an argument for herself—he'd have married her.

"Answer me, Thane!"

He smiled, a vast, pitying smile. "You just don't understand," he said. "I got to show 'em." And his brooding lips bulged out into an angry pout.

"There was a Man once," she told him, her voice fervid and strident. "And the Devil took Him up to a high place. And showed Him the whole world of waving grain. And offered it to Him. And the Man said, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan!' And He refused the Devil. And He said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

"The Devil offered more than the wheat, Thane. He offered all the power and glory of earth. And He refused."

Thane nodded. "Sure," he said. "If somebody could

just give it to me—I wouldn't want it. The only fun is fightin' for it."

This interpretation of the scriptures meant nothing to Agnes. She regarded it as merely another example of his crafty belligerence, of his being a denier, a scoffer, a perverter of the very word of the Holy Writ. "All the wheat," she insisted. "And all the power and glory of earth. And He would not have them."

"What a chump!" The lush of a fat smile drooled from his large mouth. He sent his fist crashing against the iron belly of a coat of mail, and with a thunderous laugh, stalked out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOWING THE WIND

A STRANGE and wonderful change was taking place in the animal organism that went by the name of Thane Pardway. Slowly, almost unconsciously, he was assuming the protective coloration of the new set of circumstances that pressed in upon him. He no longer ate bread. It was wheat. He no longer thought in terms of market technicalities. He thought wheat. He thought wheat, he dreamed wheat, he talked wheat, he was wheat. Wheat—a marvelous mumbo-jumbo whispered away at him in the middle of the now sleepless nights.

Through the feverish days he gloated in the great wisdom of his conceit. He'd show 'em! How? Why—he could tell by the smell of The Pit—when to do what. And when that sixth sense came to him—then to hell with government reports, the cabled advices from all over the world, and the babbling of the wise-acres. Jesus! The day would come when he felt that he was experiencing all the orgies of an army before battle. And then—God help 'em! God help Lamson. And Kershaw. And Harper. And Orville Albright. And—and all those other fellows that never were more than names to him when he got to feeling like this.

All the demons in damnation were dancing and shouting in his brain, drowning out the chorus of little cautions that whispered faint warning. That swelling egoistic impulse from within was foisting a new rapture upon him. Not only was the wheat his destiny—but he was the destiny of the wheat! The wheat needed him! World-wide wanton that she was, with her golden gray tresses waving out over the length and breadth of the earth—she needed a champion for her cause.

For the time had come when man, mere man, masquerading as the minion of the laws of supply and demand—mere man was trying to force the grain up to a corner price. The Lamson-Kershaw-Rosenfeld crowd, acting for the Harper-Wiltshire interests, had been toying with the market for the last month—setting up a price, allowing it to fall of its own weight, setting it up again—going through all the preliminary paces of testing their forces and their foes.

But now, it seemed, they were at it in dead earnest. The most recent forecasts stressed the notion of shortage. And here in the first week of April, cash wheat was selling at 78, with the futures an average of two cents more—and every indication that prices would advance into the summer.

Thane shook himself. "Big Tha'," he murmured, "it's up to you! You gotta be the Corner Buster! You gotta be the Great Bear."

The Great Bear! Corner Buster! Magic phrases, these, with which he was prodding himself into action. They were part of the booty he hoped to win from the fray. When the battle got under way he would speak of himself as the Great Bear, as the Corner Buster—and slyly attribute the authorship of these nicknames to others.

The Great Bear!

Again he shook himself, rose from his inlaid desk, stamped up and down his office. He closed his eyes and saw the magic carpet of the world of the wheat unfold to him—a magic carpet in which he was the central, omnipotent, all-powerful figure.

The Great Bear!

And blindly groping as he was, not for one moment did he question his capacity for organization, generalship and the handling of whatever situation might arise. Not for one moment did he wonder what the latest charts and surveys showed. He was unalterably committed to a conviction that had not one single logical step or solution

to the corner problem. He was angry, inflamed, drunk with the egoistic dream of his being the destiny of the wheat! He trusted only in his own mighty will to mastery. It was all the plan he had!

And pacing up and down his vast office, he paused to behold himself in the mirror. He was startled by those hard, shiny, insolent eyes—by the pouty arrogance of those fuming lips, by the angry flame that flushed up his face.

“The Corner Buster,” he growled at himself, nodding with savage assurance. “The Great Bear!”

The animal underworld of this man, unleashed by his epileptic ego, leaped back into its old lairs. A wolfish lust was biting away at his belly, an angry lynx was pacing up and down the lair of his mind, a jackal was howling from his corded throat. And their sum total was

The Great Bear!

. . .

And now, he told himself as he set out to see Henrietta Beecher’s former husband, now he had to be careful. He had to restrain himself. He had to act ordinary-like. He mustn’t let ’em see he was different.

“Alton,” he said, “I want you to buy me some wheat.”

Alton Beecher was a somewhat fattish man, serious-faced, pedantic. He held Pardway in high and awesome esteem. To him ‘Big Tha’s’ word was law—albeit he never quite understood the decisions as handed down.

“I thought we were bears,” he began. “I thought—”

“Nev’ mind what you thought,” Thane puffed, fixing his man with a remorseless eye. “You’ve made more money with me—not knowin’ what you were doing, than you’ve made any other way.”

Beecher received this broadside with a solemn sort of good nature. “Go on,” he said, “I’m all ears.”

“I’m not asking you to put your money in yet, Alton. For the present we’ll work on my cash.” (The money was to come out of a common fund established by Otis,

Gottschalk and Voss.) "And all I want you to do, my boy, is just buy and sell as I say."

"All right!" Beecher sang out. Pardway's surliness, he thought, was captivating.

And Thane, seeing that he need batter down no resistance, grew quite confidential. "This Kershaw-Lamson corner," he said. "Why it hasn't a chance."

Beecher hinted at a disparity of opinion. The figures in—

"Just a minute," Thane called. "Leaving Government reports out of this—where'd you get your figures?"

"Why, *Vonda's Review*, and *Hay, Grain & Feed*, and—"

"All right." Thane picked up a piece of paper, and began scribbling on it. "See those figures?" he demanded. "Well, call off a few dates."

Somewhat bewildered, Beecher did as requested.

"Now copy these down, Alton. Copy the figures—and put the dates beside 'em. Tell you why later."

When this was done, Thane lolled back in his chair and said, "Now keep that piece o' paper. Watch *Vonda's Review* and *Hay, Grain & Feed* for those dates. You'll find my figures printed there. My figures, get me?"

"Gosh!" puffed Alton Beecher.

"Gosh all hell!" Pardway growled. "Now just keep all this to yourself, and buy or sell as I say." He stuck out his hand, allowed it to be wrung, and went over to the Board of Trade.

There he engaged in a somewhat similar bit of mystic bullying with one Felix Lassmann.

Lassmann was a short, stumpy German Jew of about forty, with shiny black hair, alert eyes, and a heavy mustache. He had been in America some twenty years. Pardway had first taken his part in a bar-room altercation, had subsequently made him a loan, and given him a number of insights into the market that had been very profitable. Now one of the most successful scalpers in

The Pit, to him Pardway was a living symbol of the greatness of America.

Pardway liked Lassmann because he had helped him. He liked almost anybody he had helped. And he valued Lassmann because he could use him. Already Lassmann had assumed a significant proportion in his plans.

"Bloom and me," Lassmann reported, "we've been invited to join Hutchinson. A fellah came to us, and—"

"Nev' mind that," Pardway barked. "Now you just do as I say. "And keep Leopold Bloom in line. Here, I'll show you something."

He walked his protégé to the Fidelity Safe Deposit Co., took him down to the vaults, and opened his private safe. "You see them?" he whispered. "You see 'em?"

And before Lassmann could answer, Thane shut the door on his treasure, and turned the combination lock.

"Looks to me like a lotta bankbooks," Lassmann ventured. "Vell, I know you got plenty money." He thought Pardway worth at least several million.

"Ain't what you think, Felix. It's—it's somethin' I can't explain. But it'll kill this corner flat as—

"Anyway," he concluded. "Keep it under your hat. And do as I say. And get Bloom to do likewise."

Thane, noting his haphazard figures besmirching the pages of *Vonda's Review*, chuckled, and told himself that business was going on as usual. Maybe that'd hold Beecher for a while. But in reality, the episode wasn't very important. A new angle of attack had just occurred to him.

"Agnes," he said, "I'll tell you what. You remember when you made me up two sets of figures on the possible yields?"

Agnes remembered.

"Want you to do that again. Only this time do it on the visible supply. One set of figures is for me. I want it to be the absolute truth. The other—

"Well, I'm goin' publish the other. And I want it to show, day by day, how the visible supply is getting smaller. Do that right away, now. So's I can get it into print soon's possible."

"Yes, Tha'," she answered obediently. "But do you want to encourage the bulls?"

"You nev' mind what I want," he returned brusquely. "I want you to work on those figures. I'll do the worryin' on the possible consequences!"

He'd let the clique go ahead and jockey the prices up, he thought. And then, when they'd just about bought up all the wheat his figures accounted for—then he'd print the real figures. Take 'em unawares at every turn! Befuddle 'em! Let 'em come within an ace of cornering! Then slaughter 'em—

"Aren't you ever afraid," Agnes was saying, "aren't you afraid to trust me?"

"Who—you?"

"Yes, me!" she insisted. "A woman scorned—"

He eyed her angrily. "The way you talk!" he growled. "Ain't scorned. I'm just busy—that's all." And seeing Emaline Brown pass through the hall and give vent to a salty stare, he said, "Remember now, those sets of figures on the visible supply"—and stalked out.

He felt, these days, a curious, creative stimulation. There was a gigantic show he was shaping. A show that would be staged in the Wheat Pit of the Chicago Board of Trade. And the scenes and sequences of that show were constantly shaping up, snow-balling into a swirling sphere that would be juggled by

The Great Bear!

Every moment the minutiae of all the men and means and possibilities was multiplying. surging, swelling, blowing out, ballooning the sense of bewildered omniscience that was whirling around and around in Thane Pardway's consciousness. And now this nebulous, gaseous mass was

tightening, hardening, assuming planetary propensities. It was being rapidly peopled with cross-purposes, conflicting passions, ominous individualities and abysmal fears. Each and every possible consideration was pressing in upon him—a thousand terrible thoughts struck like swords into his brain.

There were times when his mind refused to face all the insistent, preying forces. And then he felt as if he were at the opera—with the curtain suddenly rung down upon the drama, but its relentless symphonic soul still slashing away at him. Not for a moment could he close his consciousness to the roar and rumble of The Pit. Even when he was miles away from it—he could hear its reverberant echoes—yea and verily, the reverberant echoes of the whole wide world of the wheat!

And yet, like a hot current gushing through a cold sea, his fierce, persistent sagacity seethed through him. He was never without some crafty animosity, some wolfish cunning with which to checkmate the bull clique. Always, the angry lynx that paced up and down the lair of his mind screamed suggestions at him. And the sense of going on, going on, going on—was galloping up and down his great body. At night he seemed to be spread out on a thousand terrible thoughts—his bed was a bed of nails. And often he felt that his brain would burst.

Still he went on sowing the wind, planting the seeds of destruction wherever possible. The day after he had given Agnes orders as to her work on the visible supply, it occurred to him that he was now in a position to command Otis, Voss and Gottschalk. Lassmann and Altou Beecher had already executed his buying and selling orders. That meant that the bankers had money in the market. Good! Now they could be called upon to protect their interests.

Protect their interests! Yes, but not in a manner they might have expected. He wanted them to set about crippling the clique banks. Of course, he told himself, the Fidelity was sure to fail. He hadn't gone to Cincinnati

for nothing! And Edgelow, who had an old score against Harper, had proved himself an able and willing man. So there was no question as to the failure of the Fidelity. Only, that was to be the crowning stroke. First he wanted to cripple it, so that the finish would be easier.

It was not long before he was in conference with his backers. In the first place, he assured them, he had succeeded in rounding up a host of powerful speculators. Not only some of his larger customers, but Hutchinson, Ream, Brega, Bloom, and the like. And in the second place, they were already in the market. Now it was up to them to back him up.

What was it he wanted? Certainly, Voss, Otis and Gottschalk agreed, they would protect their interests.

Well then—

Within an hour it was decided that George Otis, who admitted to certain banking affiliations in the East, would see to it that his New York and Philadelphia friends harassed the Fidelity. Furthermore, he was friendly with the usually incorruptible bank examiners who came through Chicago. And he could see to it that there was some fun over at the American Exchange National. And it needn't be crooked, he insisted. The fact was, the more a bank examiner held by the law, the more trouble he could make.

Carl Gottschalk, through German bankers here and there, would be able to reach the head of the Deutches Bank of Cincinnati. No doubt something could be done through this gentleman. Notes called, deposits suddenly withdrawn—

"And don't forget," Pardway reminded him, "your friend Pfeister. When I'm ready to lambast this clique, make him run a lot of indignant stories about the corner in his *Staats-Journal*. And make him get in touch with the head of the German paper in Cincinnati. And get that fellah to do the same. And get that fellah to work with the German banker out there. Raise hell all around!"

His large face assumed an assertive, playful sanctimoniousness. "Great lesson in this," he mumbled, "and we gotta learn 'em." He turned to Cornelius Allerton Voss. "And now you, you howling swell you. You don't like Orville Albright or Irwin any more'n I do. And your Columbia Loan & Trust, for the first time in its history, may be of use to the community. Now what do you think you can do?"

More than often, Voss intimated, a little mixup at the Clearing House was no help to a bank. And there were ways of manufacturing a mixup. And some of the heavy depositors at the American Exchange National were also borrowers from the Columbia. If he called their notes, they might have to withdraw their American Exchange deposits to meet his requirements, eh?

"You're brighter'n you look," said Thane. "Now hurry up and do it. And if there's any other devilment that you can think of—go to it. Don't rely on me for everything."

As for himself, he thought upon leaving, he relied on no man. Even if these bankers didn't carry out his instructions—he could lick that Rosenfeld-Lamson-Kershaw crowd. Nevertheless, they would do as he said. Which meant, by golly, that he had been sowing quite a gust of wind to-day!

And in this blessed hour, he asked himself as the Chicago sun sank into its sullen blaze, in this blessed hour—wasn't there some other piece of dirty work he could do?

Yes, thank God, there was!

He sauntered over to the Sherman House, hired a room, and sent messengers out with notes to be delivered to Vonda and Argus in person. These men were bidden to come at once to his hotel room—not to ask for him, just come up.

The little silky dandy was first to arrive. Hamilton Argus, his bald, pinkish pate asweat, dragged his tepid form over the threshold a few minutes later.

"Gentlemen," said Thane, "take a load off your feet."

His henchmen eyed each other circumspectly, and obeyed orders.

"Now you fellahs think," Thane began, "that you're competitors. You're wrong. You're both workin' for a common cause—because you're both my friends." He reached into his coat and stuck out a handful of cigars. "Now listen, boys. After I get through campaignin'—I'm goin' do for *McKillip's Weekly*. Then you two'll have the field to yourselves. And don't worry about not bein' properly supported by the rest o' the press. Guess you've noticed that 'Silent' Tompkins seems to think the same as you about this shrinking visible supply."

"Yes," Argus agreed. "I was just wondering—"

"Do your wonderin' outside," Thane replied in his most jocular manner. "Right now you listen to me. When I get good and started, I'm goin' do some tradin' for both of you. You needn't put up any money, mind. I'll just carry a certain number of bushels for you. And if we make out—why you're both in money. Big money." He smiled, telling himself that the ten thousand dollars that would go to each of them would really come up to their idea of big money.

"Now then gen'men, here's what I want. I just want to get your minds straight on this market. We're facin' a damn serious shortage. There's frost and drought and frit-fly and God knows what. Tell you somethin'. For the first time in her history, Russia is beatin' the U. S. in exports."

Argus gaped solemnly. By now, with all this Pardway hocus-pocus in his head, he had no more idea of what was really going on than a grasshopper.

"Tha'," said Vonda, "you're joking. I know my economics."

"Nev' mind economics. I know my oats!" The fun of it was, Thane told himself, that he was absolutely correct.

Agnes was working like a wizard these days. Agnes, Agnes—

“It’s never happened in the history of nations,” Vonda protested.

“Look it up,” Thane insisted in his most sober mien. “You’ll find that I’m right. And here’s what I want you to do about it.

“Make everything look worse than it is. Yowl about the shortage. Yowl about the droughts and parasites. Yowl, see? Yowl about everything. Get busy instanter!”

And without expanding upon his thesis, Thane left—first admonishing his minions to wait until after he had gone, and then slip out separately.

“Tell you what,” Argus offered after Pardway had marched down the corridor. “He’s turned bull!” His reddish, freckled face held a cunning adoration. “Sure is a sharper, that man. Saw which way the wind’s blowing—and turned bull!”

Vonda’s delicate fingers played with his silky goatee. “Difficult,” he murmured, “difficult to approximate the thoughts of such a man.” And in meditative silence, he puffed away at Pardway’s cigar.

“Well,” the editor of *Hay, Grain & Feed* said after a while, “it’s none of my business if that’s what he’s up to.” His mean eyes surveyed his fellow-slave. “My little Ray was in the hospital. Pardway paid for the operation. Pardway paid for the day and night nurse. Pardway—” He clammed up sharply, feeling that such sentimentality was unbecoming.

“Guess we’re in the same boat,” Vonda remarked, a soft, reminiscent smile playing over his dandyish countenance. “I wasn’t as well off as an army mule after I was cashiered. He came along and saw me through. Though God knows why!” He gave vent to a genial sigh. “As far as I’m concerned—if ‘Big Tha’ says black is white—then black is white with me.”

“Me, too,” Argus mumbled.

Astrut down Clark Street was Thane Pardway, glowing with a warm satisfaction. Vonda, Argus, and others of his gallery of mischief makers were already relegated to the back reaches of his mind. As he swaggered through the swinging doors of Smiling Charley's, he was wondering what new dash of rue could be spilled into the bitter cup he was mixing for the clique.

So far, he realized, he had done a good many things to add impetus to the snow-balling corner. True enough, every one of his statements to the press had been penned in gall. And his alarming figures were more or less false. But even so, they made good clique propaganda—for the present. In his laying this bull trap, it was necessary to adorn the pitfall with very attractive bait.

But now, he wondered, had he gone too far? After all, the men who came out on top in the world of the wheat—worked in terms of supply and demand, and all the lesser technicalities. He hardly bothered about them. He worked in terms of an espionage corps, the dissemination of spurious information, schemes to wreck the Fidelity—

But what about the wheat?

No matter what havoc he wreaked with men and institutions, nothing could be accomplished unless the wheat worked with him. The wheat, the wheat! The wheat—miserable wanton with her shrinking visible supply! The wheat—she must become buxom and teeming by the time the corner makers thought they had completed their job. The wheat! She must become buxom and teeming by—

Good Christ! By two or three weeks!

Just at the moment the clique thought the corner completed, just at that moment he would do his heaviest short-selling, just at that very moment Edgelow's men would wreck the Fidelity—just at that identical moment in which all these things must happen at once, just at *that* moment the wanton wheat must rise and smash down the price dam in The Pit! And bowl over Kershaw and Lamson and all the rest of 'em. And carry Tha' Pardway on the golden-

gray tide, carry him on to victory! The wheat must come crashing in—

But how?

Unfortunately, *Vonda's Review* and his other organs were circulated among traders. They hardly reached the farming, shipping and milling worlds. Yet he must appeal to the humblest of the rank and file. He must make them understand that a corner was under way on the Chicago Board of Trade!

Once the tillers of the soil knew that—he was safe. There was no way of telling where the 'mud-wrasslers' got the wheat when a corner price called to them. But even in the 'black bread years'—the golden grain gushed into Chicago if prices shot high enough!

So right now it was up to Tha' Pardway to spread the news that dollar wheat was on the way. But how?

He swaggered out of Smiling Charley's, and began marching up and down the deserted downtown streets, mumbling to himself. How, how, how?

He recalled that meeting, years back, with Governor Washburn of Minnesota. And William Dunwoody, the Governor's partner in the milling business. And Steve Gardner, a pioneer of the 'high grinding' process. And George Christian, the first man with sense enough to install the LaCroix Purifier. And Pillsbury, the great merchant-miller. And he knew several directors of growers' associations. And shippers' associations.

He would go to these men. If he could convince them, and if they could convince those about them—the wheat would soon be on the move into Chicago.

In a little while he was aboard a train bound for Minneapolis.

So! His far flung plans now encompassed the great Northwest.

Now there was another ring to the circus. Chicago! Cincinnati! New York! San Francisco! Minneapolis—

Wasn't there any end to this thing?

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HAZARDS OF MONOPOLY

MEN who are bent upon effecting a corner in any particular commodity—try to control the greater part of the visible supply. This is done slowly, quietly, cautiously, and under cover of a “business as usual” comportment. But no matter how painstaking this process—prices invariably rise. For it is hardly possible to buy outright, or take options on the greater part of the offerings—without some of the sellers becoming aware of the insistent demand. This results in a premium being put on quantities still at large. Such is the first arc of the vicious circle—for now the bulls must pay the premium in order to complete their corner. However, this is of small consequence to them. For the steadily mounting quotation increases the value of holdings already contracted for.

In a general way, this is what was happening in the wheat trade of April and the first weeks of May, 1887, through the course of what the world was to call the Kershaw Corner.

The Cincinnati men who had inspired the bull combine, and the Chicagoans who were executing it—felt that prices had moved into middle ground by May 13th. They had bought wheat at seventy-two cents a bushel in March. By April 5th cash wheat sold at 78½¢. Then for fear of hurrying matters, they slackened the pace. Off and on for the following weeks they forced a bulge, then allowed it to simmer down. By May 13th cash wheat rose to 84⅞¢, June opened at 86½¢, and July held at 85.

By this time the clique holdings were over fifteen million bushels, most of which had been bought around 77, and

now had an average market value of 85. So on this May 13th, when the bull clique felt that prices had moved into middle ground (dollar wheat being the objective) their holdings represented a paper profit of eight cents a bushel on all of fifteen million bushels. Their total profits were well over a million dollars—on paper.

No intelligent novice can help but wonder: Why then, didn't they sell out?

There were numerous reasons. First of all, man is in many ways a filthy and senseless animal, practically the only one who never knows when he has enough. Some day a kindly soul may invent a pressure gauge for human greed, and then we may approximate its limits. In the unenlightened '80s, at least, not many people knew the reaches of avarice. The Harper-Kershaw-Lamson people felt the pains of a constantly growing wheat hunger as their holdings increased. They wanted a corner. A corner—and nothing else would do them!

Moreover, they were practical men. They knew that they could not unload such a long line of wheat without glutting the market—unless they unloaded even more cautiously than they had absorbed. And to unload very slowly meant, in all likelihood, that prices would gradually ease off. In the end they would have a little less than nothing for their pains.

Practical men! They knew the hazards of monopoly. They knew that there was only one way of cashing in on their paper profits. They would have to support the market! They would have to keep on buying more wheat! They would have to exhaust the visible supply! Meanwhile, with the ever increasing demand and the ever diminishing supply—prices would be on the bulge. And that meant, if they could force the quotation up to a dollar—an additional profit of two million dollars on their fifteen million bushels—to say nothing of what was to be made on the wheat they would keep on buying.

And more. Once they controlled the visible supply—

they could announce their corner. Then poor devils who had been selling to them for future delivery—would be unable to fulfill their contracts! Where would those poor devils get the wheat? Ah! There it was! The El Dorado that the Pitman sees in his dreams! The poor suckers who had promised to deliver—couldn't get the wheat except from members of the bull clique! And these gentlemen, having effected their corner—could then charge two, three, any number of dollars a bushel for the wheat *that would have to be delivered back to them at eighty or ninety cents—the price at which options had been contracted for during the course of the corner!*

It was all a matter of whether or not the clique could *exhaust the visible supply.*

And it seemed to Messrs. Lamson, Kershaw, Albright and Rosenfeld, in secret conclave on May 13th at their chambers in the Grand Pacific Hotel—that they could do it. Certainly they had ample backing. And certainly, Nature was conspiring with them. At first, there had been room for doubt. Then, as a slight shortage showed itself—they had a gambler's chance. But suddenly, now, the tide of fact was swiftly sweeping them on to their golden goal. This shortage was no maybe! This shortage was no piece of cooked-up calamity howling. This new sudden shortage came crying out of the mean wowl of a Manitoba blizzard. This new sudden shortage came crying out of the chortling rage of a Kansas cyclone. And every succeeding day another county, another state, another wheat belt was joining in the chorus of the great, grewsome refrain. For despite the fact that somewhere in the world harvests were always going on—

The red rust was ravaging Nebraska.

The washout rains were rotting the Dakotas.

The Hessian-fly was laying waste Ohio and Indiana.

Drought was throttling Iowa.

And there were other evil omens for the growers, shippers, millers, and short-selling speculators—but signs of

good augury for the men who were bent upon a corner. Grasshoppers, the barberry and its black-rust, army-worms and frit-fly were rife upon the land! The plowman must rust his share, seize the hopperdozer, and see what might be saved. The hopperdozer, the fungus diseases, the kerosene spray, the burning of the stubble, fasting and prayer—these must supplant the seeding, the threshing, the peace and plenty of a vast supply and its attendant Thanksgiving!

Furthermore, in his column of the day before, 'Silent' Tompkins had revealed the fact that Russia for the first time in her history, was surpassing the United States in wheat exports!

This very morning *Vonda's Review* had taken up the tale of woe, showing indisputably that Russia, with the exception of India, had the lowest yield per acre! And still she was pouring forth the world's wheat—whilst fair America sulked in shame and faced famine!

And whatever wheat we would have in sizeable quantities, said *Hay, Grain & Feed*, would be shrunken, wrinkled, bleached, frosted, and bin-burned.

Truly, the black bread times!

They were right, Kershaw and Lamson and Albright and Rosenfeld told themselves over and over—they were right! They could make it! "It merely means, gentlemen," Lamson concluded, "that it's a question of time from now on. By God, there's not much new stuff coming in! We're exhausting what wheat there is! In a week or two, we'll be able to announce that we control the visible supply! And then," he shouted, suddenly aghast and inspired, for the first time seeing the golden dream come true, "then God help 'em!"

He was referring not only to the millers who must keep their saddle-stones and purifiers grinding. He was referring not only to the millions and millions of hungry mouths that would be crying, "Bread—bread or blood!" He was referring to Pardway and Hutchinson and Ream

and Brega and Bloom and Beecher and Billy Linn and all those fellows that Zena Albans and Glen Swazie and his other emissaries had told him were likely to sell short. Sell short, would they? Well, where were they going to get the wheat to deliver? Where were they going to get it? They would have to come to him, or Kershaw, or the others of the clique and redeem their pledges! They would have to pay *two or three dollars a bushel for the privilege of fulfilling contracts to deliver at eighty or ninety cents!* That—or go smack up against the wall! And that's where he'd like to get that big bastard Pardway—smack up against the wall!

"The first week in June!" he cried; enchanted. "Then we'll call in the press and tell 'em we've made our corner!"

"Hurrah!" cried Orville Albright.

Kershaw and Rosenfeld merely smiled their nervous, constrained smiles. They would have to do the fighting in The Pit!

These men parted for the time being with very high hopes. As one of them remarked, "We have every reason to expect the speedy consummation of our plans. It seems to me we have accounted for everything."

It was very nearly true. They had accounted for almost every certainty and hazard of their monopoly—except one named Thane Pardway. And he was quite unaccountable.

The bull clique had agreed that their corner was to be announced on June 1st. Imagine then, the surprise and chagrin of these crafty, self-assured men, when *Vonda's Review* for the third week in May carried an indignant account of what had been going on, of how it had come about, hinted at the Chicago figures involved, and as much as mentioned the Cincinnati backers.

Imagine that—and then visualize, if you can, Thane in his glee. Put one over, he said to himself—why that was no name for it! Now the corner people would be set back quite some while. Right now they were in no position to

force their monopoly—so they were denying the implications. They had quite a little work and worry ahead of them before they could make any announcement of their having taken over the bulk of the visible supply.

And *Vonda's Review* wasn't the only county to be heard from. 'Silent' Tompkins would have his say-so in a day or two. And Hamilton Argus would make his indignant protest in the next issue of *Hay, Grain & Feed*. And the newspapers would copy—surely after Will Ewing did a news story in the *Inter-Ocean* on it. And the foreign press would take up the cry—egged on by Johann Pfeister's *Staats-Journal*. Why Heavens alive, that'd throw a scare into those pirates like a ton of brick!

And now he had a few more details to wind up—and then he'd start on his pestering campaign. First place, it was the last week in May. That meant it was Vera's birthday.

Vera was the daughter of one Saunders, an old clerk at Kershaw's, befriended by Thane in many ways. For the last several years Pardway had sent some useful articles out to the West Side domicile on the occasion of the child's birthday.

A coat, he decided, would do the trick. In a few minutes he had dispatched this bit of sentimentality that had somehow worked its way into his scheme-ridden consciousness—and turned back to the order of the day.

He drove out to his house, and stayed just long enough to see how the work was progressing there.

"Agnes," he said, "listen to me a minute. These figures on the visible supply you're compiling—now there are two sets of 'em. The one I'll use for publication, that shows things at the very worst, won't it?"

"Yes, Tha'!"

"Now then, what's the ratio of the real figures to the others? What I mean is, how much more wheat is there on hand than the figures I give out say there is?"

"About two times as much."

"In other words," he propounded, "if the time comes when the visible supply, according to the figures I give out, is ten million bushels—there are really twenty millions. That right?"

She sighed. "Yes, that's right."

For a moment she became something other than a mathematical index. "What's the matter?" he wanted to know. "Seems as if somethin's botherin' you."

"Haven't you noticed—" Her eyes began to sparkle. "This is a new dress."

He stared at her—a man in falseface with a meaningless grin spreading over his features, a man in falseface gently reproving a tragic muse. "New dress, eh?" he mumbled. "Hope you'll—you'll get a lot of fun out of it."

And telling himself to bear in mind that his printed figures on the visible supply were only half true—he walked out of the house, bent on his pestering campaign.

In considering the hazards of monopoly, Thane thought of nerves. Nerves, he said to himself, nerves. Funny, how men got attacks of nerves when they had a lot at stake.

He tramped over to the nearest telegraph station, and sent a message to Orville Albright that read:

YOU AND KERSHAW CANT CORNER STOP ILL CRASH
YOU STOP YOU BETTER STOP STOP

THE GREAT BEAR

Similar messages to Albright followed the next day. One told him that his home would shortly belong to the Great Bear. Others derided him in high dudgeon and childish glee.

Almost every hour, now, a flock of telegrams flew out at Kershaw; Rosenfeld; D. W. Irwin of Irwin, Greene & Co.; George C. Brine, of Hamill and Brine; to M. C. Orr; to Biggers, Lamson's partner—and other men and firms that Thane believed to be affiliated with the Lamson-Albright-Kershaw-Rosenfeld interests.

Another angle of this pestering campaign was the forwarding of distressing notes to the wives, mothers and mistresses of the men who were being harassed.

By a dozen methods, Thane set about annoying and unnerving the members of the clique. One of his most successful devices was taking rooms adjacent to those in which the Kershaw-Lamson people met. In his years about town, Thane had occasion to be more or less friendly with the managements and room clerks of all the leading hotels. It was fairly easy for him to be advised as to what suites Lamson and Kershaw would rent, and to secure adjoining chambers. In this manner he kept the clique on the jump, pursuing them from the Grand Pacific to the Palmer House, from the Palmer House to the Leland—

Had 'em on the jump, by golly! And now, if only he could somehow undermine Lamson's morale. Lamson, undoubtedly, was the strategist of the clique. Do for him, and it might take the heart out of the others.

Hm, Lamson! Had to do more than pester him. Had to lick him! Had to do something to make those bristling blond hairs lie flat. Had to do something to eat away at those cold, selfish cat eyes. Had to do something to crumple the squarish set of his shoulders. Lamson, had to lick Lamson! Lamson, who was a little like himself. Lamson who wanted to be like himself—and yet be held in esteem by the conservative elements. Lamson who wanted a wife and a mistress—Lamson! If the man were a horse, Parkway mused, he would be set down in the racing form as Lamson, sired by Convention, out of Revolt. Lamson! There was only one instrument that could hack away at him—Zena Albans.

Hm. Zena Albans. Still kept on coming to the office, she did. And made a great show of being friendly. Gave him the key to her place—but no more. Dropped in once—and she froze over.

Hm. Zena Albans. Life sort of turned fancy-women in-

side out. Soon as they became professional—they looked warm, but were as cold as an ashean in January.

How could he get her to do his bidding? She wasn't the ordinary sort of kept women. She had swank, independence, social grace. What's more, she treated Lamson like a dog—and made him like it.

Now that he had the pestering campaign running, he would have to get that San Francisco business straight. And once he did, he would appeal to Zena Albans. After all, you never could tell. The woman seemed to have a good, sound horse sense. She knew Tha' Pardway was a better man any day of the week than Frank Lamson—

As he was sitting back in his office and ruminating over these tortuous machinations, Wilkins entered with a note from Hutchinson. Thane read it, smiled, put on his hat and went out.

So, he thought, the old buzzard wanted to have a quiet and secret confab with him, eh? Must be in trouble. Been selling considerable wheat, the old boy had. Well, see what he wanted.

In accordance with the directions of Hutchinson's message, Thane made his way to Lincoln Park. And arriving at the North Boulevard entrance to the East Drive, he looked about for a shabbily attired man who was to be perched atop a buggy.

B. P. Hutchinson was not adverse to gloating over the hazards of monopoly. In fact, up to recent weeks, he had taken no little comfort in such thoughts. But just at present, on this sundown of the last Wednesday in May—he was bitterly rehashing the hazards of balking monopoly.

As he saw the bulky form of Thane Pardway swagger up to him, he sang out, "Hi, there"

"Hello, Hutch. What's up?"

"Glad to see you," Hutchinson said, extending his hand. "It seems to me that you and I ought to come to some understanding."

The Great Bear put his large foot up on the hub of the wheel. "Only thing I'd like to understand," he essayed heavily, surveying the spavined nag and the tattered upholstery, "is why a man in your position goes around town in a rotten old buckboard like this."

"*Buckboard!*" Hutchinson exclaimed indignantly.

Thane smiled and climbed up to the banker's side. "Seem sorta upset, Hutch. What's this show-down you're plannin' to have with me?"

"Upset, you call it?" Gone was the chary tweedling, the scrappy assurance. "Upset, am I? Why I've been selling short! Like you agreed to. Like Jones and Linn and Brega and all our people are doing. Yes, sir, selling short!"

So, that was it. Well, couldn't blame the old man for feeling glum. Must have taken a good tanning this morning. Let's see—June had sold at 88. She was on the rise again! Well, josh the old boy a little. "Selling short, eh? And on this rising market?"

"Don't look at me as if I were a fool," Hutchinson snapped. "You've been selling short, too. Your man Lerch was selling a whale of a line this morning. And that other trader of yours—what's his name—Pulski. And Alton Beecher was selling this morning. He's with you, isn't he?" He jerked the reins, and the spavined nag listlessly jogged along. "Course you've been selling short! Though goodness knows, you seem as gay as a lark!"

"Hutch, I've been hedging. I've bought a bushel for every one I've sold." Thane looked into those tired, fishy eyes. "Seems to me you've been doing your share of pussy-footin' to find out what my men are up to."

"Pussyfooting—rot! Why everybody's talkin' about it! I saw Ream and Brega this morning. They wanted to know what you were up to."

"Why should they come to you?" Thane demanded. Very likely, he thought, Hutch had told his group that he controlled 'Big Tha.' And now, after they had taken

considerable of a beating—they were beginning to doubt the old man's leadership.

"There wasn't any particular reason for their coming to me," the banker was saying. "Just—talking, that's all."

Trying to squirm out of it, Thane reflected. "Well, Hutch, seems to me you had little to see me about. Or haven't you spoken your piece as yet?"

"I should like to know whether or not you're with us. And if you are—why can't we get together?"

The Great Bear smiled. "I came around to make amends some while back," he said. "All I got was a cold shoulder. Now let me tell you somethin'. I know more about this market than you'll ever know. And it's the God's truth that I'm goin' sell short when I get good and ready. There's no question of whether or not I'm with you. The only question is—are you and Ream and Jones and the rest of 'em with me?"

Perhaps, Hutchinson thought, this rude blusterer really did have some vital information beyond the reach of any of the others. He swaggered so! And his eyes and his deep voice were brimming with confidence. How he loved to lord it over people! "Well," he said, "I'll see what I can do. Of course, you realize that I can't speak for the others. As for myself, I'd be perfectly willing to let you hold the reins if you make plain just what's in your mind."

A crafty answer, Thane silently conceded. Things certainly were going his way. Hutch would never even suggest this—unless things were getting too hot for him. Well, in another week things would be hotter. And then he'd simply override Hutch, and rope those other bears. For the present, he was going to show the old buzzard where he got off.

"Fat chance of me telling you what's in my mind," he growled. "You'll do as I say—or you won't. That's the best I can do. And you're lucky I'll bother with you at all. The Great Bear can't afford to be annoyed

“And now,” he added, “you know how it is with a man in my position. The Great Bear can’t afford to be seen in this damn buckboard of yours. So if you’ll kindly turn around and deliver me to a hack stand, I’ll be darn grateful. And when the time comes, and if you behave yourself—I’ll tell you what to do, and how to do it!”

Hutchinson pulled up to the curb. “You can get out now,” he ordered sharply. “And be damned to you!” His whinnying laughter rang in Thane’s ears. “The Great Bear! Heh, heh, heh! That’s a good one! The Great Bear!”

Thane stolidly lumbered down the gravel path.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A BULL IN 'FRISCO

EVER since his coming to Chicago, Thane had been a bear. The reasons for this were more or less obscure, buried beneath a whole host of feelings, convictions and those curious illusory reactions to little incidents that so often shape men's lives. Had he been asked the whys and wherefores of his predilection for the short-selling side, he would probably have muttered, "Everything that goes up—has to come down." It was no answer, he knew it was no answer. But he had long since stopped troubling himself about the matter. He felt, vaguely, that the short side was more professional, that the profits therefrom were likely to be greater—and that a bear onslaught was a more dread thing to behold. Somehow or other, selling short was hooked up with the legend of cunning, perspicacity and terror that he wanted to weave about himself.

All this to the contrary—on the last day of May he went long one hundred thousand bushels of cash wheat in San Francisco. It was a queer thing for him to do, he thought. And still, it was a good bet. Conditions in San Francisco were such that the bulls out there should be highly successful. This steadily mounting price in Chicago was acting like a great magnet, drawing all the wheat in Canada and the Middle West into The Pit. Those who had been selling in San Francisco would be left high and dry. They wouldn't be able to deliver! The bulls out there could put what price they liked on the grain!

And by gum, he was going to be with 'em! The Great

Bear of the Chicago Board of Trade was going bull in 'Frisco!

He had hardly wired his commitments, when Zena Albans was shown into his office.

"Mrs. Albans," he stated brusklly, "you and I've known each other a long time. And I don't know as we ever came to an understanding. And all the while there's been a sorta queer feelin' between us." He smiled. "Now you just sit tight and let me do most of the talkin'.

"I'm coming out with it pretty plain. Near as I can figure, you're Frank Lamson's woman." She wasn't batting an eyelash! But her lips got all crimped up like an angry kiss. "And during this while I've known you," he went on, "you've been trading through this office. And I've got a hunch that it wasn't on your money. I got a hunch it was Lamson's. And I think there were two reasons for Lamson sending you to me. The first was to buy up a lot of wheat without doing it himself. And the second was to get me to tumble for you.

"And I want to tell you," he concluded earnestly, "that you've been doubly successful."

"Do you really like me?" she purred. The full flood of her warm eyes engulfed him. "How nice! I've always liked you."

"Like you! Why, I'm crazy about you!"

A deft, barbed smile glanced off her tight lips. "That being true," she parried, "why don't you allow Miss Weatherly to marry young Swazie?"

"Eh—what's that?" For a moment he felt undone. Might Glen have been babbling over at Lamson & Biggers? "'Tain't neither here nor there," he declared throatily. "I'm doin' that for Miss Weatherly's good. When he can support a wife—I'll give him my consent. And a weddin' present into the bargain.

"But talkin' about you and me. Now let's agree that your friend Frank is tryin' to corner the wheat. And he

expects, probably, that I'm buckin' him. Well, maybe I am. And maybe I'm not. At any rate, there's no use denyin' it. There's no changin' the opinions of a bull-head like Lamson."

He noted that she was beginning to be very much interested in what he had to say. "Now listen, mam. Whether or not I go into this thing, I want to see Lamson licked. 'Tain't only that I got old scores to even up with him. There's somethin' else. Do you know what it is?"

"What?" she asked, feeling fairly certain of his reply.

"If I can get Lamson licked—I guess I can have you."

He leaned back in his chair, heavy, authoritative, businesslike. "Tell you something, mam. I know you don't like Lamson. I mean down in your heart. Way down in your heart, if you had half a chance—you'd like me. Because you know somethin' about men. You know that I'm ten times the man he is. And what's more, I'm ready to prove it."

What went on in the hearts of women, he wondered, when they listen to such words? After all, they hadn't been raised up to the idea of closing out to the highest bidder. And yet, none of 'em seemed to react any differently from this one. Eyes got a little shiny, lips drew close and had to be softened before they could speak—and that's about all.

"Tha'," she was saying, a little hoarsely, "what do you mean?"

"Just this. I think Lamson's going to get licked. If he does, he'll have other things to think about besides you. When that happens—I won't have anything else to think of *but* you. You can have everything Lamson's giving you—an' more. And here's how we start." He felt in his pocket for a check which had been held in readiness for this moment. "Here y'are, mam." He shoved it at her. "You see, that's how I'm different from Lamson. I can be nice to you now. He couldn't do that. He'd have to know what he was getting."

"Do you mind facing about?" she asked. "I want to put this in my stocking."

Elegant and formal, he mused, looking up at the ceiling. Anyway, she might thank him!

"I presume," she went on, "that you want me to do something for you."

He nodded. "Some day soon I'm going to be in a room in whatever hotel Lamson and his pals are conferencing. And I'd like for you to be in that room with me—doin' nothin', you understand, that you don't want to do. And you're to write a note telling him what room you're in, and asking him to come down and see you. A bellhop will take the note to him. And then, when he comes down and knocks at the door—you're to let me put my arms around you, and tell him to come in. That's all."

Her eyes were glowing. Her crimped lips curled away from each other.

"All I want to do," he explained, "is break that fellah's heart at a time when he'd got a lot on his mind."

"It's mean," she said after a while. "He's very fond of me."

"Not too fond to be playin' with Miss Duveyne."

"O her!" Mrs. Albans exclaimed, and smiled her belittling smile. "He doesn't care any more for her than you do."

He stolidly returned her glance. "I hear different."

She had no answer for that. "Suppose," she said, "suppose I really care about him? Suppose I take your money—and don't come?"

He laughed. "That's the chance I take. But I love gambling," he added, rising and swaggering up and down. "And women love a gambling man."

"Quite true," she agreed. She ran her hand down the swelling curves of her shapely bosom, and prepared to leave.

. . .

Queer woman, he reflected. Sure was cold inside. The whole business had been a little clammy. And somehow sad. Maybe he had just thrown away his money—

Anyway, he couldn't bother thinking about it. Right now he had a four ring circus on his hands, with things happening all at once in Minneapolis, Chicago, Cincinnati and 'Frisco. And he had to crack the whip in all places at the same moment. But more than anywhere else, in 'Frisco.

Ah, the bull kettle was aboil in 'Frisco! Every hour he got a wire from his brokers out there. Wheat was riding the crest of the wave. She was going up, up, up! Now he had to shove more irons into the fire. He had to buy more wheat in 'Frisco. He had to do his getting while the getting was good. He'd wire additional orders immediately.

On Saturday, June 4th, the newspapers of the country printed amazing accounts of what had occurred that day in the San Francisco market. For the first time in the history of that exchange, wheat sold up to two dollars! 'Frisco bears had gone down in a raging panic.

By noon of that day, hours before the papers carried any mention of the San Francisco corner, Thane had closed out his bull line.

By golly, he was almost sixty thousand dollars to the good! Sure was going some! He had captured enough of a stake to sell short on more than half a million bushels!

Strangely enough, he was hardly exuberant. Was there something wrong, he wondered. Had a sorta funny feeling—

Maybe he hadn't been so smart. Already prices in The Pit were mounting on the 'Frisco news. By evening the papers would be full of it.

Hell! The growers and shippers, entranced by two-dollar wheat in 'Frisco, would try to get their grain on the move to the Pacific Coast. And there was no stopping them! Friendship or no friendship, Minneapolis scheme

or no Minneapolis scheme—two-dollar wheat was a golden lure.

In a way, by going into this 'Frisco business—he had helped spring a trap on himself!

Why hadn't he thought of that before? And still, he had no way of knowing that wheat would go so high.

There were only two things he could hope for. First, that the bull price in 'Frisco would burst like a bubble—because of the shipments that might suddenly pour in. And second, that once the price exploded, the grain would again be on the move to Chicago. Transportation was the main hinge on which the problem swung.

Hm, transportation! The failure of the western roads to declare dividends in 1884, coupled with the exorbitant rates for hauling that were being gouged out of the growers—had almost precipitated a panic. In the last few years there had been practically no road construction. Thousands of miles of partly laid track had been rotting in the sun. This meant that despite the great price the grain was bringing in San Francisco, consignments to points west would be smaller than they might have been with the carriers in decent condition. But even so—it was extremely likely that those growers in California and the Prairie Provinces that had a direct route to 'Frisco—would bend all their energies upon rushing the grain there.

Wow! What a mixup! If that fearfully high price reigned in 'Frisco for any length of time—the sympathetic rise on the Chicago Board of Trade would be prolonged. And already, God damn 'em, wheat had crossed 90 in The Pit. And God only knew what it would go to—if that 'Frisco bulge lasted. And if it did last—God help everybody that was selling short on Kershaw and Lamson.

Why the hell, he demanded of himself, why the hell had he sold short yesterday in Chicago? Couldn't he have waited? No, he had been so damned excited about the upswing in 'Frisco—that he had put down real money, his own money!

And it was lost, gone, wiped out—if that 'Frisco price prevailed.

Here was a new development, strident, clamorous, calling for solution—a solution that was in the hands of Fate itself. Again the anarchic turbulence of the world of the wheat had uprooted Thane Pardway. He felt now the full glow and terror of the great game he was playing. The wheat, world-wide wanton that she was, with her golden gray tresses swishing in waves as far as the world was wide—the wheat, the wheat! The wheat—only a day ago he seemed to have had her where he wanted her! And now she had gotten beyond him! Now she was going against him! Now she was rising up in her wrath and rage—responding to no other force but her own great earth-wide will!

What would the outcome of the whole business be? There was a fair chance that things would react, if not in his favor, at least not entirely against him. The unfinished mileage of the robber roads would work in his favor. The rising tide of price in the Chicago Pit, inasmuch as it would beckon to the Midwest growers and shippers who would not dare gamble on the 'Frisco chance—that too might be in his favor. But everything else, from the sudden ascendancy of Russian exports to the wild upheaval in the 'Frisco market—was certain to be counted against him. And the wheat—angry, wrathful, insolent, clamorous, disdainful of all the purposes and passions of the men who wanted to possess her—What would the world-wide wanton do?

As he sat in his office, bewitched and glowering in this apocalyptic revery, Wilkins dashed in with the news that wheat had just crossed 91 in The Pit.

91—91—91—91—kept on hammering in Pardway's brain—91—91—91—91— And yesterday he had sold her short at 88 $\frac{7}{8}$! And there was no telling how high she'd bound on this 'Frisco news— "Get Silas Dore to cover for me!" he snapped.

But before the transaction could be put through, wheat reached 91 $\frac{3}{8}$.

91 $\frac{3}{8}$ —the clique had drawn first blood! The Great Bear had been driven to cover—at a loss of 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cents a bushel on every one of three hundred thousand bushels!

The Great Bear—driven to cover!

Little consolation in that half an hour later the quotation was 92 $\frac{3}{4}$ —a new high for the movement.

As the market closed word came in that Hutchinson, in an attempt to recoup his previous losses, had sold short in large quantities at two o'clock. He too had been a heavy loser. All of his cohorts had been heavy losers. Not a bear but had been put to rout at 92 $\frac{3}{4}$.

O how high could she go, this world-wide wanton with her swishing, swirling surge that swept everything before her? How high could she go?

For the first time in weeks Thane felt weary and unsteady on his feet. His brain no longer boiled—it was dull. He thought of gathering about a few boon companions, drinking, gambling, or going the rounds of the gay places. But he had no heart for it. Instead, he went home.

Alone and morose, he sat, staring at the decanter on the library table, swaying from side to side, puffing forth his surly contempt. It was one of his few stupid moments. He was silently vilifying the very Fate that had so often smiled upon him.

He dragged the decanter to him, poured forth a draught, and gulped it down. Each time, he was thinking, each time he had responded when the wanton wheat called to him with the swish and surge of her siren song—each time he had left something precious behind. True, for the most part he had been successful. And at times a stream of gold had flowed into his coffers—the gold that gave him his goodfellowship, his girls, his right to say and do and live as he pleased! But at what cost? What was the price he had to pay?

He recalled now, the women he had left behind when he had gone off to the wheat wars. One of them dead. A

dozen, perhaps two dozen, forgotten. Of the most recent, there was Kate Mercer, hearty, and proud, and passionate. Sweet woman, she had been. Mother of his child—maybe. Kate had been left behind when he had buckled on the sword in '78, when that New York fellah, Keene, had raised hell in The Pit. And after that, Selena Glynn, Elsa's sister, who had been left behind for those squeezes in '82. Poor Selena! Dead! And now Agnes, who for all that had been between them, was still sweet to him. Agnes, for whom he had cared more than for any other woman! Agnes, who had soothed, then shaken him. Agnes, who seemed to have started some blaze within his—

No! He didn't have a soul.

Agnes! There she was now. Must have been standing there for minutes. Her soft eyes glowing at him. A sort of warm pity warping her pale lips. Agnes, thin and frail and white and sweet and sad. Agnes staring at him—as if she couldn't speak. And he understood her silence. Her work kept her in constant touch with what was going on. She knew what had happened in The Pit. And she was worried about him, wondering if there was still any hope for him.

"Are you coming down to dinner?" she asked. "It's after seven."

"No. Don't want any dinner. You go on down."

She felt that she no longer had the right to intrude upon him. Now there was no more than a memory between them. And still—

"Are you worried, Tha'?"

"Yes. I'm worried." Gosh Almighty, if his head didn't feel like a house! "That's an awful pretty dress, Aggy. You look so nice! Something about you, Aggy—something about you gets lovelier every day."

"Please—Thane!"

"Don't worry 'bout me," he assured her gravely. "I ain't startin' in on you. Ain't aimin' for anything. Just talkin'—" He reached for the decanter. "All so pretty

and dressed up," he mumbled, closing his eyes. "Guess you must be goin' out to-night.

Her faint, "Yes."

"Swazie?"

There was no answer. After a moment he looked up at her. Her eyes were beginning to sparkle.

"Swazie?" he repeated.

She nodded.

"I s'pose the young scamp's pesterin' you," he growled, "pesterin' you to marry him. Well, I won't have it."

She came and sat by him. "Thane," she whispered, looking into his eyes, "do you really believe I'm such a fool? Do you really believe that I'm going to marry Glen Swazie—just because you say you won't let me?"

"Hey?" Jesus! If only he knew what to say to her! If only she set up a yowl, heaped the usual coals of fire on his head—then he'd know how to handle her. But this soft, sorry-for-him attitude— "If you're goin' out with Swazie," he said, "you'd better hurry up and get dinner over with."

"Is there anything I can do for you, Thane?"

"Yes. Lemme be."

"Thane, do you mind if I stay here? And just talk to you?"

He glanced up with a wary eye. "What about?"

"Glen."

"O—him! Sure, talk away."

"You'd like me to marry him, wouldn't you, Thane?"

"Well—seein' as how he loves you, and all."

"Thane! Why won't you be honest with me? Do you realize, Tha', that you've only been frank with me when you were brutally selfish? And perhaps," she added, surprised at the thought, "perhaps that was why you succeeded in making me do anything you wanted. And you'll never get me to do anything, Thane, unless you're honest with me. You're shamming now."

"How do you know?"

"I know it," she insisted, the love logic within her sweeping up and strengthening her assertion, "I know it, I know it! That's all there is to it, Thane. I know it!"

Well, he said to himself, outside of being a bull in 'Frisco and a bear in Chicago and a snooper in Cincinnati and a sucker in Minneapolis—outside of all that he had to be a cockeyed-liar on Wabash Avenue. "I am being frank," he protested.

"You're not, Thane! I know you want me to marry Glen." For once she was able to outstare him. "And I might do it—if you openly suggested it."

Hm! He thought he knew something about women! "I don't get you," he said. "I just don't get you. I don't believe you. I—"

"Thane, listen to me—"

He stared down at the rug, telling himself that he'd be rid of this old shebang pretty soon. He'd copper the clique—and take over Orville Albright's new house. And—But what was this?

"You feel you've wronged me," she was saying. "And you're trying to compromise with your conscience—by making believe that I care about Glen. And you're worried about me. I've become a problem to you, a problem you're not able to solve. Because you still have some feeling for me—you can't deliberately shove me aside. And so your only way of being rid of me is either having me go—or getting me to marry Swazie." She paused, amazed at her analysis. "And I can't leave of my own account, Thane. I'm sorry, but I can't. I know you'd be happier if I did—but I can't." A tear trickled down her pale cheek. "Maybe I'm cruel too, Thane. Maybe I just want to stay because it hurts you. Even that's something," she sobbed. "And I—I have to have something."

"Don't get hard, Aggy," he said tenderly. "No matter what happens—don't get hard."

"I'm not hard," she sobbed anew, touched by his alarming pathos. "I'm really not hard, Tha'. I just said it

because—because I thought it was the only thing you'd understand."

And he, moved by this revelation, replied, "No, no, Aggy. You were the only soft thing in my life. Don't let me lose that. I've got to have something, too."

Her hand tingled against his for a second. "I'm not staying to hurt you," she whispered brokenly. "While there's life, Tha', there's hope. And I just can't help staying here—and hoping for the miracle I know can't happen—the miracle of your caring."

He rose, and tramped into the parlor. Good Christ, what was to be the end of this?

After a few minutes she came up to him, and asked, "There's no other woman, Tha'?"

"No," he assured her, "there's no other woman."

She seated herself at the neglected piano. "I'd go, Tha'!" she exclaimed sharply. "I'd go if you could make me! Just as you once said you'd marry me—if I could make you do it. And now I know that you're in the same position I was. You can't make me go. Something in you—"

"That's right," he admitted hoarsely. "I can't make you go."

"And so your only hope," she went on, swinging back into her original thesis, "is that I'll marry Swazie. And I'll do it, Thane, if you tell me to. Anything, I'd do anything to make you feel happier. But don't try to trick me. Just tell me—and I'll do as you say."

Christ! There was something in this woman that got him! Right now he could reach out his arms— Except that sort of business was over and done with. No use going through that again. It would only wind up the same way. And even if it didn't—with his arms about this woman, he couldn't think of

The wheat!

The wheat, God damn 'em, they had shot her up to 923 $\frac{1}{4}$!

And what the hell was he going to do about it? That stuff in 'Frisco was like a fire that might flare up and—

“Didn't you hear me, Thane?”

He shook himself. “Yah. You mean to say you'd marry this fellah—if I told you to?”

“Yes!”

Well, why didn't he tell her to? Damn it, maybe he couldn't. Maybe he couldn't give her up. Hm. He'd have to find some excuse. “G'wan,” he growled, “I don't believe it. I don't believe a word of it! Why would you do it?”

“Now I'll have to ask you a question, Tha'. You're very much worried over the wheat. And still, I'm certain you wouldn't retire from the market—even if you knew the wheat would crush you.”

“You betcha!” he growled.

“And why do you keep on with it, Thane—despite the fact that you may be smashed?”

“Got to!” he thundered in righteous exuberance. “Sort of what I was meant for! Sort of my destiny, I calc'late!”

“And you,” she sobbed softly, “you are my destiny. I feel that you may crush me—by handing me over to Swazie. And yet, if that's what must happen—”

“Lemme alone!” he roared, rising and kicking his chair back from him. “Lemme alone, can'tcha? You think I ain't got enough on my mind as it is? Wheat opening at 90! And 'most hittin' 93! And me—me!” he thundered—“tryin' to crash a whole damn corner! And a bunch o' bulls goin' crazy in 'Frisco and purty near startin' panic—

“And you! You drivin' me crazy now! What the hell do I care what you do? Marry Swazie—or don't marry him! I—I—I—”

For a moment he was terrible to behold. A surge of arrogance, passion, and remorseless pride sent a blotch of crimson over his swarthy cheeks. The bluish veins were

swelling out over his lowering brows. His lips were mashing in speechless fury.

As long as she lived, Agnes told herself, she would never forget that explosive face. She could see that he still cared, that he resented his own emotions, that for a second he wanted to sweep her into his arms, that his pride had prevented this, that for the first time he seemed to hate Swazie—

The bell rang.

“Tha’,” she whispered, “that must be Glen. I’ll run up and wash my face. It must be all red from crying—”

He nodded, and with a glower of fury and adoration, watched her as she flew up to her room.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SELLING THE WIND

WHY was it, Thane wondered, that *McKillip's Weekly* carried estimates of the visible supply that substantiated those printed by Argus, Vonda and Tompkins?

Had Lamson and Albright and McKillip been taken in by those false figures? Were they so anxious to absorb—that they were willing to believe anything that made their goal seem nearer?

It certainly was a knotty problem. And the latest rumors in The Pit only complicated matters. For now it was being whispered about that Vonda, Tompkins and Argus were being subsidized by 'Big Tha'. Most likely the clique had circulated that story. All right, that was believable. But why then, did their organ print similar estimates? Why?

Hamilton Argus was announced.

"What's up?" Thane queried, noting his henchman's beleaguered eyes.

"Up?" Argus repeated. "Why, they're saying I've sold out to you. What am I to do?"

Thane lolled back in his chair. "Keep outa my office, for one thing," he ordered sharply. "And for another, keep a stiff upper lip. I'll arrange to see you later. Meanwhile, make yourself scarce."

So, he said to himself, the storm was about to break. Well, to-morrow he'd start selling in dead earnest. He could no longer afford to wait. If wheat didn't sag to-day, he'd sell to-morrow, sure.

Sell what?

There was a question! Wheat? He didn't have any wheat. From the looks of things, there hardly was any wheat. A little came dribbling down from the Northwest. Perhaps his trip to Minneapolis had been to some avail. Perhaps the movement there was just getting under way—and the next few days would see large shipments into Chicago. No use hoping for wheat from elsewhere. The 'Frisco bubble had hopelessly tangled matters from the Mississippi to the Pacific. Not that the two-dollar price had gotten much wheat to 'Frisco. It had started a tide of wheat on its way—a tide of wheat frozen up on uncompleted tracks and sidings and half-way junctions—

Still, none of that was the answer to his own problem. He had to start selling now—or never.

Yah! Sell what? He hadn't any wheat. He hadn't any reason to expect large shipments. He had to sell—

The wind!

Selling the wind! It was a conclusion, a mania, a phrase rising out of the grandiose desperation of the short-selling Pitman. It was a phrase almost as old as the earth itself. The whole course of human history could be wrapped around that phrase. Selling the wind! Ever since the millers of Babylon had ground the golden grain with their sandals, ever since the fellahs of ancient Egypt had bashed the golden grain with their flails, ever since the piores of imperial Rome had pounded the golden grain with their hand-stones—ever since then, and up through the ages of the pestle, the quern, the saddle-stone, cattle mill, treadmill, windmill, water-mill, and the great roller mills—up through all those ages wheat traders had talked of selling the wind.

Selling the wind! Wondrous and terrible phrase it was—implying that those who sold could not deliver! Implying that those who sold were banking on the inability of others to buy! Implying that those who sold might later be able to deliver—because the market would break under their onslaughts! Implying that should the market break.

they would be able to buy for delivery—much under the figures at which they had sold what they didn't have. Implying—a whole host of fearsome phantoms rising out of the spectral nightmares of monopoly.

Yes, Thane decided on the Monday following the 'Frisco episode—he would sell the wind!

And now, in order to lay down a smoky barrage that would obscure his first assault, Thane prepared to strike at the clique from an unexpected angle.

There was a man named Armour, of New York, El Dorado, Milwaukee and sundry points east and west, more recently a Chicago packer, a member of cattle combines, a founder of missions—against whom Thane had harbored an overworked grudge. So long-standing, and so lamentably overworked was this grudge—that its owner no longer had the faintest idea of how it came into being. However, Armour, he presumed, was in one devious manner or another affiliated with this Harper Deal. And brother Armour had recently been toying with pork. Now then, why not drag a red herring across the clique trail by making a hullabaloo about Armour's pork interests?

In a little while Thane was in conference with Judge Brechtenhauer and Senator Kirkland. After he had settled matters with these gentlemen, he tossed their righteous indignation into the skillful hands of 'Silent' Tompkins and Will Ewing. On the following day there was much steamy disputation as to whether or not Phil Armour would go to jail for cornering pork.

The Kershaw-Lamson crowd made adequate reply to this hot-air cannonading. Cash wheat shot through its previous high and touched 94.

Thane, standing on the sidelines of The Pit, signaled to his floor-traders. As the price indicator struck squarely at 94, they unleashed a flood of selling orders.

Ten thousand bushels! A hundred thousand! Two hundred thousand! A million—

And still the price held!

Holy smoke! Were they going to support the market indefinitely? Here he was, throwing nearly three million bushels at 'em—

And the market didn't break!

She didn't sag!

She didn't even yield an eighth!

There went all of Gottschalk's coin. And Moses Hemmingway's. And—

Hutchinson ambled up, his lanky arms aflop in that purposeless, jackstraw motion. His face gray, his peering eyes still softened by a musing pathos, his drab seersucker threadbare and awry—he looked more like a scarecrow than ever. "High time," he mumbled dubiously, "high time you were selling. Should've done it weeks ago."

"She won't budge!" Pardway fumed, glaring at the indicator arm.

"She'll budge, all right," Hutchinson promised, "if you only stay in line."

Thane turned a beady eye on his cranky ally. "What's the trouble?" he wanted to know. "Your gang o' gamecocks puttin' up a squawk?"

"Trouble!" the old man mumbled, ignoring his cohort's insinuation, "trouble!" And in melancholy vehemence, he mouthed that choice couplet of mischief:

"Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

By way of valedictory, the closing bell clanged ominously.

"She's not budged," Thane said. He saw Lassmann hovering about, signaling him with insistent eyes. And leaving the wry and fuming Hutchinson, he strolled over to his henchman. "Felix," he whispered, "meet me over to the office after hours."

Then he took himself off. He wanted to walk alone, to

mumble some feverish gibberish at his epileptic ego. And so he did, tramping around and about the outskirts of the downtown district, pausing for a while at the Union Depot to watch the trains come in, passing the time of the day with a number of Canal Street barkeeps.

What was up, he wondered, what was up? Three million bushels showered on the market at one sweep—besides the Hutchinson, Ream, Linn, Brega, Jones, Bloom, and other bear offerings. And not an eighth off! Why?

No telling!

Anyway, he had gone straight into enemy territory. If the next few days brought no relief—he stood to lose his all. And Otis' all. And Hemmingway's. And Lassmann's. And—

Yep! He had crossed the Rubicon—and the other side looked like hell.

Well, there were only two things to do. Quit now, and take a loss. Or sell on, and maybe—take a greater loss.

Pleasant prospect!

He ambled back to his office.

Lassmann, already there, greeted him with nervous eagerness. "Tha'," he said, "they're putting already the skids under Hutch. Some of his men want to unhorse him. They say he's lost a big lot of money for them, and—"

"How d'you know?"

"Well, I been approached. They want me in with 'em. Same thing with Bloom. They say—"

"Nev' mind what they say!" Thane barked. "Now listen here. You go to all those fellahs. And get 'em lined up ready to sell when I do, see? I stand ready to sell two bushels to their one. And they needn't put down a dollar until they see me in action!"

His forceful, inspiring glower fell upon his protégé. "Tell 'em we can't lose, see? An' say that I don't want meetings. And I don't want conferences. I just want 'em to sell when I do.

"And one more thing. Tell 'em all to holler bloody

murder about Armour. Get Armour in more of a pickle, see? Now go 'bout your business. I'm busy!"

When Lassmann left, Thane set out for Zena Albans'. The woman sure had made a mess of money lately, he was thinking. And she'd been very cute with him. Now if she only went through with his plans—

He took her to dinner, and presented her with a diamond bracelet. Then they went to see Denman Thompson in *The Old Homestead*.

Between the acts he whispered, "You all agreed to my little scheme?"

"If you think it will do any good," she answered archly, pressing his hand. The warm flood of her eyes swept over him. "Are you afraid I sha'n't play fair, Tha'?"

"Don't know," he grumbled, breathing heavily. What a vibrant, fascinating, elegant animal of a woman this was, he told himself. Something between her and himself. Her breathing was as heavy and impassioned as his own. And her magnificent bust throbbed against him as it swayed and fell. Wow! If this wasn't a theater—

"Can't make you out," he admitted, his nostrils dilated by the breath of desire. "Far as I can see, you don't care about this Lamson fellah. And you seem to have taken a shine to me— Anyway, just don't go back on me. It ain't healthy. And for the last time, now. You're coming when I give the word?"

"When you give the word," she promised.

On Wednesday a disturbing quiet reigned over The Pit—the quiet before the storm.

It was somewhat reassuring to Thane. What with this day's perturbation over the threatened jailing of Armour, and the sharp decline in the visible supply as stated in the Vonda and Argus prints the bulls didn't know exactly what to do. Good sign! Particularly as he didn't press the advantage immediately. They'd wonder why. Well, to-

morrow they'd know. They'd be even more puzzled to-morrow. He'd release a whole new flood of selling orders.

But first, in order to protect himself, he'd have to see George Otis. Wouldn't be surprised but what part of today's calm was due to the Otis-Voss-Gottschalk institutions suddenly throwing their weight into the balance. For the last week Otis had submitted a short résumé of each day's machinations in the banking world. And now the Fidelity and the American Exchange National were about to be squeezed from New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and Chicago.

When he asked Otis if the concentrated attack had gotten under way—

"You bet!" the banker assured him. "We're calling loans all along the line. Every time we see a chance to strike—bang!"

"Good boy!" Thane sighed thankfully. "Now give 'em plenty to-morrow morning, see? Because I'm goin' ride 'em hard to-morrow. I'm goin' ride 'em hard as Nebuchadnezzar's horsemen!"

And he did!

On Thursday, June 9th, cash wheat opened at 92. Subject to pressure, it wavered, and gave a point. And then another.

All at once, the clique bought up everything in sight. Cash wheat snapped back to 91.

Thane immediately switched his attack to the futures. He drove the August delivery down a point.

And as soon as the clique sought to repair that salient by heavy supporting orders—he switched again, and clawed away at September.

Meanwhile, Hutchinson and his disgruntled crew, taking heart at these biting onslaughts, and seeing the bulls battered and bloody and bewildered, jumped into the breach. And a host of minor bears, the small scalpers and pin-money picadors, followed suit—all selling the ripped and tattered futures.

Now the bulls, faced with this barrage all along the line, threw their support to the July-August-September deliveries.

The Great Bear immediately backed away from September, whirled around and furiously hacked away at cash wheat. Once more it broke—slipping from 91½ to 89½.

And then, seeing that Pardway was the dominant, inspiring force among the bears, that they must do for him at all odds, the clique switched the counter-attack to cash wheat, facing him squarely and furiously, buying three bushels for every two he sold—and driving the ready grain back up to 93.

But Thane had already eluded them. He was smashing away at July again—

It was a cruel, cunning, crippling assault—but by and large, to little avail. Cash wheat closed strong at 92½.

As for himself, Thane reckoned at the end of the day, his personal position had been bettered. The bulls had demonstrated that they knew he was the one with whom they had to deal. And the bears were now flocking about him. They all knew he was

The Great Bear!

And yet, it was small consolation. If things kept up at this rate, he'd have to throw all his own money into the balance—and borrow more!

Thane had not been home since Monday. He had taken a suite at the Palmer House, wanting to be in the center of things both day and night. From his offices and from the sidelines of the Board of Trade he directed the offensive in The Pit. From his hotel suite he kept all the lesser issues on the griddle, the ever active pestering campaign, the still spinning web of espionage, the plans for the wrecking of Harper's Fidelity—

These days he was doubly careful about being seen with any of his hirelings. He no longer gave Agnes Weatherly's summaries to Vonda, Tompkins and Argus. She had been

dealing direct with these men for the last week. These days he didn't know what the visible supply amounted to until he scanned the pages of *Vonda's Weekly*.

On Friday morning he noted that the visible supply was something like twenty million bushels. Hm! According to that two-to-one ratio, there were only ten million! It meant that in a day or two—the clique would think they had achieved their corner!

Well, well! Have to check up on that. And as he was mulling over matters, Agnes was announced. He had her shown in immediately.

“What brings you here?” he inquired tersely.

“Tha', you've been selling!” was her anxious rejoinder.

“Not much.”

“Millions, Tha'!”

His large hand waved her out of his world. “Ain't nothin' for me,” he mumbled. “What d'you want?”

“I want to have a final talk with you, Tha', before you sell any more. You ought to know exactly how much wheat there is. And—”

“You're right there, Aggy. Tell you what. I'll talk to you to-morrow. To-morrow sure,” he promised. “I'll be out to the house. Now run along.”

After she had gone, he buzzed for his secretary. “Wilkins,” he said, “come with me.”

The two men put on their hats and went down to the street. Thane stopped at the first luggage store, bought a large suitcase, and handed it to his companion. “Carry that,” he ordered.

Then he led the way to the Fidelity Safe Deposit Co. They went into the vaults. Thane opened his private safe. He stuffed its contents into the suitcase.

“Grab it,” he snapped, “and come along.”

He walked his secretary to the Union Depot, and put him aboard a train. Not until the wheels had begun to move did Wilkins know where he was bound. Then Pardway handed him a ticket to Cincinnati and a letter of introduc-

tion to Edgelow, and said, "As soon as you've put all this in Edgelow's hands—come back."

He swung off the coach, and drove over to the Board of Trade.

For over three hours he had his men jump in and out of the market, much as they had done the day before. Again, he gained little.

It seemed to Thane, that evening, that the bulls had purposely held off from forcing the issue. Why? Were they testing his strength?

All right, then! To-morrow he'd come down hard—hard as the hinges of Hell!

On Saturday, an hour before closing, he sold two million bushels for July delivery. What offerings were made by Geddes, Jones, Ream, Linn, Schwartz, Hutchinson, Beecher, Bloom and the smaller bears—he did not know. But it was evident, as soon as his onslaught got under way, that the others were accepting his leadership.

Hard as the hinges of Hell, he had promised himself—

And July slipped from 86 to 85.

And to 84.

And to 83.

Then Thane called it a day. "I'm through for the present," he told Lassmann. "You might advise the boys not to go too far. They're layin' a bear trap."

The word was passed around. Pardway, on Alton Beecher's check-up, saw that all but Hutchinson and one or two others had abided by his decision.

"I quit?" the old athlete had squeaked at Lassmann. "O no! Not me! It's not for nothing that I've been selling all these weeks. And now that I've got 'em where I want 'em, I'll beat no retreat! Who is this man Pardway to tell me when to sell?"

And so 'Old Hutch' jumped into the fray, his soapy face aglisten with a triumphant glee.

It was a costly venture. The bulls, scenting that the

greater part of the bear forces were resting arms, rushed at 'Old Hutch' and gored him for three points.

Only the closing bell saved him from further punishment.

Pardway stood watching the gangly form of his antagonist-ally. Too bad, he mused. The old man sure had gotten his!

"Howdy, Tha'."

The Great Bear swung about. Well, by jumping jiggers—Frank Lamson! Stocky Frank Lamson with his bull neck, and the same bristling blond hair. "'Lo, Frank."

"I suppose you think you've done yourself proud," Lamson sneered. "Well, you needn't. We were letting you sell."

"Damned nice of you!" Pardway retorted. "I s'pose you'll be letting me sell when I hammer her down to 70!"

Lamson's bullish snort echoed up to the gallery. "70! More likely it'll be 170! I'll get you!" he vowed grimly. "I tell you, Pardway, as sure as you're standing here—you'll be standing in my office and making deliveries at 170!"

"Shake!" Thane called in mock glee. He seized his adversary's hand, and squeezed it until the man grew purple. "I love you, Lamson," he rumbled. "The only thing that hurts me is that I haven't got my hands around your throat. Huh! To think you'd go fightin' a man like me!"

How he hated the man, Lamson told himself. Hated the way his swarthy face looked so unmoving. Hated the way he could stare down at you as if you were only a worm at his feet. "G'wan!" he snarled. "Your face doesn't impress me any more. You've been selling nothing but phantom wheat—and you know it. You know you can't deliver—"

And Pardway, with a stony, arrogant smile, inquired, "You spoken your piece yet, m'boy? Or is there more to the recitation?"

"There's more!" Lamson barked. He stuck his finger

up into the Great Bear's face, and repeated an old bull battle cry:

“ ‘He who sells what isn't his'n
Must pay the price or go to prison!’ ”

And with a proud, challenging snicker, he took himself off.

How like me he is, Thane was thinking as he went back to his office.

He wrote a letter to Zena Albans, telling her to meet him five o'clock Sunday afternoon at the Richelieu Hotel. These lines were delivered by a messenger who was instructed to wait for an answer. The man returned with a note that read:

Eternally thine,

Zena

“That's a hot one,” Thane said to himself, glancing at the violet paper which had been lettered in white ink, “that sure is a hot one!”

He had no means of knowing, but not only had his message been read by Lamson, but it was Lamson who dictated the reply.

It seems, at times, that there are only three sorts of things that come into our lives. Things to be forgotten, things to be explained, and things to be marveled at.

It is to be marveled at, that on this Saturday afternoon, in the midst of his greatest involvement on a far flung battle line—Thane Pardway's one impulse was to go out to Kate Mercer's and see little Joe.

And so he did, heavy of heart, somewhat weary, and feeling but distantly related to himself.

The usual scene was enacted. Kate Mercer was her heatedly unforgiving self. The boy was put through the paces of his plague stricken prayers. And later, Thane

glanced down at the little sleeping soul, wondering, wondering—

“I hear you’re in the market again,” Mrs. Mercer said.

“Yah.”

“That Lamson crowd are up to your old tricks, Thane. They’ve been here. I wouldn’t be surprised but what they’ve been to see that girl over at your house.”

For the first time in years, his vision fully encompassed this woman. What lovely red hair! And what wide-set, glaring eyes. And her freckles—funny, and cute.

“Why are you telling me this?” he asked. “Just to make it harder?”

She nodded.

He picked up his hat. “Well—g’by.” And with that he went out, and started for home.

Home, he thought, home—and Agnes. Hadn’t laid eyes on her for a long while, except for those few seconds yesterday. She’d be glad to see him.

But when he entered the Wabash Avenue establishment, she looked anything but glad to see him. Even more pale than usual, he observed. And worried looking. And unwilling to face him. What was it? Something about Swazie, perhaps? Well, that could wait. All he wanted to talk about was wheat.

“Agnes,” he said, “like I told you yesterday, I haven’t sold near the wheat I intend to. Now it looks to me like Monday or Tuesday I’ll have to throw the works. And before I do, I want to hear your figures.”

She nervously went through her papers. “By Monday,” she predicted, “there will be about seven million bushels.”

“Yah, I know about that, Agnes. All along we’ve been talkin’ about the visible supply in terms of the estimates we give out to Argus and Tompkins and those people. I don’t mean that any more. I mean just between you an’ me. What’s the real visible supply? Is it fourteen or fifteen million bushels?”

“Seven million bushels.”

"You don't get me!" he called loudly, somewhat annoyed at her stupidity. "I mean the *real* visible supply." And then he glanced up at her pale, stricken face.

She shrank away from him, whispering, "I just couldn't do it, Thane. I just couldn't send out those false figures—" He was stunned.

For several minutes he sat there, slowly feeling that he was coming back to himself. Hm. So that was why *McKillip's Weekly* had estimates similar to those printed by Vonda, Tompkins and Argus. Gee whiz! Who'd have thought it—Agnes doing him dirt!

"You've gone too far," he mumbled softly.

She waited for some awesome, bellowing fury. But he merely breathed more heavily, and kept his eyes down on the carpet.

"I couldn't help it," she sobbed. "I thought it would keep you from going into the market." She moved over to him and touched his hand. "Now that you know how little wheat there is, Tha', you won't go in, will you?"

"Well," he said, "well. This was unexpected." He got to his feet, took his hat from the rack and left the house.

No doubt of it, he told himself, as he tramped about in the dusk. He certainly had been selling the wind!

And there was no hope held out to him by the world of the wheat. True enough, recent shipments, had been a trifle larger. The grain was on track somewhere— But where? And even if it did get into the local market by Monday or Tuesday—was there enough to stem the tide?

No.

Well, he was fighting. And he'd fight on! But—

On whose money?

He couldn't go to his backers. There had been definite agreements as to how much they would risk. And their money was—

Exhausted!

His own resources were heavily dented. There was only one man to whom he could turn—Daniel.

He piled into a cab and drove to his brother's.

"Listen here," he said as soon as he entered. "This wheat business is in a hell of a mess. And I need money, and I need it bad. Now this is no time for arguments and opinions, and you tellin' me a lotta grand things about how I ought to run my life. All I want is a yes or no. I'm fightin' with my back to the wall. And I need between a hundred and two hundred thousand dollars on Monday mornin'. Do I get it?"

The merchant did not hesitate for a moment. "If you put it that way," he said, "there's no question about it. But what's the trouble? You didn't look so up against it the last time I saw you."

"Trouble? My only trouble is, I been hooked up to a good woman."

He reported the session with Agnes. "To think of it!" he cried. "She couldn't bring herself to give out a lotta fake figures. But she could bring herself to make *me* believe they were fake."

"Sounds very funny," was Daniel's comment. "You wouldn't think so nice a girl would do that."

"Aw, there's no end to what they'll do!" Thane stormed in impassioned wonderment at the hearts of women. "There's no end to what they'll do if they love you! She did it for *my good*, see?"

Daniel kept silent for a while. Then he said, "I've promised my support, Tha'. And you can count on it. But don't you think it's unreasonable to go up against such odds?"

"I don't welsh," Thane sang forth in his swaggering sing-song. "And I don't back down! And I don't crawl! And I don't crawfish! Course it's unreasonable! That's why I'm goin' do it!"

"How?"

Thane stared back into his brother's sea-gray eyes.

"Don't ask me the details, Danny. But here's how. First place, I'll see Argus and Tompkins and Vonda soon's I leave here. We're goin' to get up new figures on the visible supply. Great big figures! That'll throw a scare into those bulls.

"Then to-morrow I'm goin' break Frank Lamson's heart. Don't ask me how. But I'll do it. And he's the clique general. If I get him off his feed, they won't know what to do next. Then on Monday I'll sell like hell—"

"Sell what?" Daniel demanded.

"The wind!" Thane cried exultantly, "the wind! Phantom wheat! Don't tell me I won't be able to deliver. I know it. I won't have to deliver. Because they won't be able to buy, see?"

"Because Monday or Tuesday, as the case may be, I'm goin' smash the Fidelity Bank of Cincinnati. And as soon as she's down— The American Exchange National will be in Dutch. There won't be any money for that clique to go on buyin', see—"

Daniel beheld his brother in solemn, icy frenzy. "You're crazy!" he exploded quietly. "Two hundred thousand dollars of my good money—" It was unbelievable! Tha' was joking, he told himself. This scheme of his all a hoax—"Selling the wind!" he sputtered in chill exasperation, "selling the wind!"

The Great Bear nodded. "Selling the wind," he repeated in a surly monotone, thinking that Agnes, too, was a hand at this phantom short-selling.

CHAPTER XXXV

BITER BITTEN

FELIX LASSMANN was an important adjunct of the pestering campaign. He hired people to track the members of the combine to whatever lair they used for purposes of conference. He hired adjoining rooms. He made himself generally obnoxious.

Now and again the clique spokesmen appealed to the management. And the management, usually friendly to the prince of goodfellows, would say that Mr. Lassmann was a friend of Mr. Pardway's—and that seemed to settle it. The outraged bulls would tuck their collars under sweltering chins, and seek a new haven.

In this manner they had been routed out of half-a-dozen hotels. On Friday they had taken rooms at the Richelieu. It was in this hostelry, on Sunday, that Thane was pacing the floor of his room, awaiting Zena Albans.

He was thinking that her message of the previous day was not reassuring. Despite its astounding terseness, it was too florid, too loving. And there was nothing, he told himself, that he distrusted as much as a loving woman.

Still, it was quite conceivable that she wanted to do Lamson dirt before appearing under new management. It was also quite conceivable that she was playing 'Big Tha' for a sucker. Perhaps, when the time came, Lamson would enter the room, try to look broken hearted, and go away laughing.

Or perhaps, if she had given away the game, Lamson was planning to bring in the cops. Perhaps they wanted to lock up 'Big Tha' on a disorderly conduct charge, and so keep him out of the market. Well, that wouldn't work.

He had guarded against that by renewing his acquaintance with the house detective. And his politician friend, Owney McGlory, had seen to it that a central office man was stationed in the lobby, a central office man with orders that come what may, he was to act entirely under the direction of Mr. Pardway. And even if all this went wrong, he had made arrangements with Judge Brechtenhauer to be bailed out any time of the day or night, and kept at liberty on a writ of habeas corpus.

So far as he could see, if Zena and Lamson were still in cahoots, there wasn't anything they could do to him.

There was a knock at the door. Gee, the woman must be early. "Come in!"

It was Felix Lassmann, who had been stationed in the lobby to keep track of the comings and goings of the clique members. "Tha'," he whispered excitedly, "there's something important I must tell you. Kershaw just left the conferenz."

"That so?"

"Sure it's so. Five minutes ago he's walking out of the lobby with the longest face I ever seen. Leopold Bloom's down there. He saw him, too."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I'm hiding right away behind a pillar. But a friend of mine in our rooms upstairs," he continued zestfully, "our man upstairs just comes down and gives me the wink. And I followed him outside. He says there's talking loud up there. Kershaw said he was going. And somebody that sounded like Wiltshire, told him he didn't give a damn. Say, someding must be wrong, ha?"

"Kershaw had a long face, you say, Felix?"

"As I live so—like this!" Lassmann flapped out his arms. "They must be in trouble, Tha'. I'm telling you, somedin's wrong. When a man has a face so long like—"

Exactly what the dissension within the clique was, Thane did not know. Just yesterday Otis had wheedled his Phil-

adelphia friend into calling some Wiltshire paper— "Tell you, Felix," he said importantly, "I want you to—"

A rap on the door. Thane, somewhat discomfited, opened it a crack. Zena Albans!

Rather sheepishly, he admitted her, introduced Lassmann, and sent the man on his way. "You just hang around the bar, Felix," he ordered. "I'll see you later."

He turned to Mrs. Albans. "Hello, honey!" He surveyed her supple, statuesque form.

"Tha'," she lisped softly, sweeping up to him with her arms extended, her lips crimped for kissing.

"Sit down," he said. "You and me got lots of time for monkey-business. There's somethin' I wanna get straight with you. I didn't have you come here so's we could cut-up. This is business, pure and simple. And when it's all over, honey, why maybe you and I'll get to know each other a little better. But right now, you don't have to feel anything, see? Only the moment Lamson comes to the door, I want you to step into my arms. You don't mind that, do you?"

"I'd love to."

"And say, Zena. As long as you and I seem to be workin' so smooth, I might as well stick in somethin' else. You know, it's not goin' make Lamson feel so good when he finds you here with me. But—but it'd make him feel a lot worse if you had very little on."

She turned her back to him. "Unhook me," she cooed.

He helped her out of her dress. "And now," he suggested, "s'pose you just sit down and write a few lines, asking Frank to come to this room."

She smiled obligingly, seated herself at the desk, and picked up the pen.

Damned handsome woman, he observed, glancing at her bare shoulders.

"Will this do, Thane?" She handed him the note.

"Fine!" He left the room for a moment, entrusted one

of the chambermaids with the delivery of the message, and then returned.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "you certainly are goin' the whole hog!" She had completely disrobed.

"Do you have any of these?" she asked, pointing to a mole on her left breast.

"I guess so." No sense fooling around with this woman! In a day or two hell would break loose in The Pit. And he had to keep his mind on the wheat.

There was a light tapping on the door. He sat down on the bed. She came and sat next to him, twining her arms about his neck.

"Come in, Frank!" she called.

The door opened slowly. And there stood—Glen and Agnes.

.

Biter bitten, Thane was saying to himself, biter bitten!

He rose, went to the threshold, and stared into Swazie's flat eyes. "Young fellah," he said, "this is no place to take your girl. You better get outa here."

Then he slammed the door in those two young faces, and turned the key. Back against the wall he stood, swaying meditatively, from side to side. After a few moments, he was conscious of Zena's deep breathing. He looked at her, saw her stretched out on the bed, pressing her voluptuous body against the wall. Her eyes were ablaze with the hostility of fear.

"You know," he observed quietly, "you must be used to a low sort of fellahs. You look as if you expect nothin' less than a hidin'. Well, you needn't be so ascared o' me. I don't hit women."

He saw that she was surprised, that she hardly believed that she was to escape unharmed.

"Here," he said, picking up some of her things and flinging them at her. "You put these on."

She began, slowly, to dress. She was still watching him,

still wary of him, still keeping as much as possible out of his reach.

"G'wan, get off the bed," he growled. "A person can't dress lying down. G'wan! I won't hurt you."

She timidly left the bed. In a few minutes she was pulling her dress down over her. Then her arms crooked up over her shoulders, her hands ineffectually reaching down her spine.

After watching her struggle, Thane began to help her, joshing her about the stupidity of having hooks where they were least accessible.

Once dressed, she did not seem to know what to do. She was waiting for him to make some disposition of her case.

"You sure are all het-up," he remarked. "You've forgotten to powder."

"Now this fellah Lamson," he continued as she rubbed a chamois over her cheeks, "I was always under the impression that he was more of a man than this. He got you into this thing. It's a wonder he doesn't come down to see how you're makin' out."

"He—may," she said uncertainly.

"G'wan! Not him! And for all he knows, I might be tearin' you in half. I tell you, mam, when you come near Lamson, you smell skunk. Hm. Now take me. If I'd 'a' gotten you into a fix like this—I wouldn't be the man to leave you in the lurch."

Her eyes told him that she believed this. He could not help feeling, somehow, that this woman cared for him. "You just sit down," he ordered, "and let me do the talking."

"Now here's how I see this thing. All the while I've been trying to make a sucker outa Lamson by usin' you—he's been up to the same game. And he was usin' more than you. He must 'a' known that his clerk Swazie was in love with my ward. Swazie must 'a' blabbed about my bein' opposed to him. And Lamson, I reckon, convinced Swazie that the way to win the girl—was to show her what

a dog I am. And the best way of demonstratin' that—was to have her catch me here with you." He smiled "Hooked me good and proper, didn't you?"

She made no answer. It was 'Parson' Lerch, she reflected, that had really given him away.

His smile spread into a wide, silent laughter. "Say, I'll bet Glen had some time gettin' Agnes over here!"

"She was in love with you, wasn't she?" The warm flood was flowing back into Zena's eyes.

"I don't know—maybe."

"If she really cared about you," Mrs. Albans essayed, "she never would have come here."

Might be true of some women, he granted silently. But not Agnes. Poor Aggy! Glen had talked her full of this business. And then she just had to see for herself. Because she believed her Tha'. Her Tha' had told her there was no other woman—

"We'll leave Agnes outa this," he announced with judicial solemnity. "I want to get some things straight about you. You know Lamson wouldn't dare come down here, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you pull this trick so that it went his way?"

"For one thing," she answered aloofly, almost resenting his probing into her affairs, "for one thing, I owed it to him. Whatever you think of me, I didn't do it for money. Not for his. Or for yours. Here." She felt into her bag, and handed him his bracelet and the check.

"What's the matter?" he drawled scornfully, "don't you think the check's good?"

"Yes, I suppose it's good."

"Then keep it! You and me ain't finished—not by a long shot. Now tell me what other reason you had for doing me dirt this afternoon."

"You wouldn't believe me."

"Probably not," he agreed. "But you might tell me just for fun."

"If your ward married Swazie—" Zena's large eyes became misty. "Then perhaps I could have you." Her lips puckered up. She moved toward him, her shapely arms outstretched.

"Not so fast!" he shot at her. "I've had all the love I'm lookin' for. Just sit down."

She flung herself down on the bed, reached into her bag for a cigarette, and smoked away, staring at the ceiling.

"Now I tell you what I think," he was saying. "You've probably been the mistress of half-a-dozen men. And probably you hate all the men in the world. But you can't thrive on that. And being that you have to look out for yourself, right now you're Lamson's girl. Next week you might be mine. And you feel as far as Lamson and I are concerned—it's dog eat dog. You probably don't care which of us wins."

Indolently, astutely, she puffed on, pausing to remark, "You must be a horrible person! To state things so frankly!"

"I'm goin' tell you how I feel about you," he went on doggedly. "You're the only woman I ever met that I couldn't be sure of. And I'd like to break you, see? And as soon as I've got a little time on my hands, I'm goin' get to know you a lot better. And I'm goin' make you love me. And all the while I won't give a damn for you. And that's the way I'm goin' pay you back for what you did to me to-day. I'm goin' break your heart."

She rose and stood before him, in statuesque humility.

This was no longer the towering harlot of their previous meetings. This was a great, glowing courtesan queen, engaged in a battle of wits and passion with a man who threatened to become her master, rather than with one of those numerous males who begged for the privilege of being her slave. Ah, here was a man who had taken up the challenge she flung down to every male who crossed her path.

"Right now," he went on, "I'm too busy to bother with you. Howsomever, you've been tellin' me how much you like me. And I reckon you feel you come off pretty well for anybody who crossed Tha' Pardway. And I reckon you think Lamson is a skunk for not comin' down here and seein' how you made out. So if you feel sorry for anything you've done, and if you'd like to make it up to me, and if you'd like to get back at Lamson for anything he's done—here's your chance. Just tell me this. What wheat is the clique stocked up on heaviest?"

Her eyes swam at him. Her cheeks glowed. Her crimped lips twisted tauntingly. "Wouldn't you really like to know?"

"Yes," he admitted, "I'd really like to know."

A pause. "Will you kiss me?"

He considered that for a moment. "If that's the only way of getting you to tell me, I'll kiss you."

She swept up to him in an outburst of glamorous passion. Her hands went out to his cheeks, her nails tingled sharply against his skin. "You'll kiss me," she murmured warmly, "just because I want you to."

Thane, noting her trick of rolling her eyes up beyond their lids, said, "Shoot when you see the whites of their eyes!"

He could feel her fury in the sudden clenching of her hand at the nape of his neck.

"You and I are goin' have a lot of fun," he declared as she moved away frigidly. "I love women with a lotta hell in 'em. But right now, all I wanna know is—what wheat is the clique holding most of?"

"July."

Probably the truth, he told himself. "And what's the July peg?"

"The what?"

"The figure at which they must support the market," he explained. "The price that they can't afford to have smashed through."

“85½.”

That probably was also true. “Now, Zena, if you’re just dying to have me kiss you, I’ll oblige.”

“You needn’t,” she returned snappishly. “Besides, I’m going.”

“Better take your check and bracelet,” he advised in ponderous malice. “And never take any wooden money.”

In a heavy, unthinking, belabored mood he smoked the rest of his cigar, and then went down to the bar.

“Is this a way?” Lassmann demanded. “With good money in the market—you have to be with a woman yet in a hotel!”

“Quiet, quiet,” Thane admonished. “What’s new?”

“Hoyt just went out,” the major domo of the pestering campaign reported. “His face looked awful funny. You’d think he was by his own funeral yet. Tha’, to-morrow we got to give ’em good!”

“You’re right there, Felix. Now looka here. Get ready to sell like hell to-morrow. And meanwhile, have a talk with Bloom. And get his mind all set on selling. And do the same with those fellahs in Hutchinson’s crowd who ain’t so strong for the old man. Hurry up. I’ll see you to-morrow.”

The Great Bear tilted his hat down from behind, hailed a cab, and had himself delivered before the drab Saunders residence on West Harrison Street.

Good thing he’d remembered little Vera’s birthday, he reflected, tugging at the bell-ringer. Old Saunders knew what was going on at Kershaw’s, sure as shootin’. Straight as a rod, but—

“Who’s there?” came a sleepy, creaky voice.

In a few minutes Thane was seated in a cold austere, practically unused Sunday parlor. And a little old man with a white nightcap askew on his silvery pate was piping incredulously, “Why, it’s Mr. Pardway, sir! What can I do for you, sir?”

“Saunders, do Kershaw and Lamson and their large customers hold more July than anything else?”

“O, no sir!” replied the astounded Saunders, but he nodded his skeletonous head up and down.

“And is 85½ the July peg?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, sir.” Again the bony head nodded vigorously.

“Thanks,” said Thane. “You can go back to bed.”

Well, he thought as his cab swung around toward the heart of the city, it had been a good night’s work. So, the July peg was 85½. That meant it had been smashed through on Saturday. Perhaps that was what the bulls were conferencing about. Perhaps they had just been letting him sell—as Lamson had said. But then—why should they do any such thing? If Lamson said so—it wasn’t true. Hm. Should have seen that at the time!

At any rate—he’d smash through the July peg tomorrow.

He was so near the imagined victory that he was beginning to see beyond it. In the manner of a soldier before battle, he did not want to think of the carnage to come. He wanted to quietly and somberly reflect upon that which had always been his chief concern—the multitudinous wonders that are eternally at work upon human hearts.

To the extent that she was capable of caring for any one, he thought, Zena probably cared about him. There was something in the manner of her crossing him that exposed an emotional interest. And it was indeed a very strange thing that Agnes and Zena, one the white flower of virtue, and the other the red rose of a cultivated viciousness, through their love for him, had betrayed him.

And still—because of this development on the July peg, perhaps Lamson had been the biter bitten.

At any rate, now Agnes was sure to marry Swazie.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE KERSHAW CORNER

HUNDREDS and thousands of people visit the Chicago Board of Trade every year. And certainly, to these casual onlookers, the Wheat Pit presents a scrambled, dismaying, almost meaningless spectacle.

For the most part, the trading is rapid, facile, concise—a more or less orderly process operating within unmitigated chaos. Mechanically, the throats of a horde of men click off quotations. Mechanically, the jabbering fingers of these men bid and take. Mechanically, the telegraph instruments along the sidelines rattle off the peripatetic prices from every exchange in the world. Mechanically, the traders scurry back and forth from rows of telephones connected by direct wires to their firms. Mechanically, the owlsh indicator overhead twitches from an eighth to a quarter. Mechanically, the men and the mechanisms and the world-wide machinations merge into the murmuring mutations of organized chaos—

Why?

There are many possible replies. There isn't a good answer.

Somewhere in the world wheat is in seeding. Somewhere in the world wheat is in harvest. Somewhere in the world a wash-out rain is uprooting man's labor and his dream and his urgent need. Somewhere in the world a grasshopper, clicking along with infinite grace, makes a sound strangely similar to the telegraph instruments—

Why?

Men like B. P. Hutchinson and Thane Pardway, even in their most involved moments, will pause to wonder over

these things. The staccato murmuring of the organized chaos goes on. Then suddenly 'Old Hutch' or the Great Bear feel a freezing dread turn every inkling into ice, every inkling but one—

Something is happening!

The Pit has suddenly gone crazily human! This is a monstrous and terrible thing. A machine must not become human. It must not be prey to hopes and fears and untoward threats and heart-chilling deceits—

But sometimes it is!

Because of some strange activity in the deeps of finance—the eternally churning, molten possibilities of the world of the wheat suddenly shoot to the surface and belch forth their volcanic fury. In the upheaval the surcharged prices plow up through the highs of years—and wreak a memorable havoc on these unfortunates who have been caught unawares. After this is all over—it is called a corner.

Or again, because of some strange activity in the deeps of finance—a threatened upheaval suddenly simmers down. Simmers down . . . and down . . . and down! And those who have been speculating on its going up—stand to lose. When this happens it is said that the bottom has dropped out of the market.

When such phenomena are in operation—buyers may suddenly become sellers. Or sellers may buy to cover. Or those who feel they should buy—are suddenly without supporting orders. Or—

Bedlam breaks loose. On one side of The Pit wheat may be selling at 70. On the other side at 90. The plastic chaos becomes a broiling fury. Men rush to the clicking telegraph keys. They listen. What they hear is meaningless. Liverpool doesn't understand. Toronto doesn't understand. Buenos Aires wants confirmation—

Men rush to the telephone. The telephones may not answer. The men rush to headquarters. What are they to do? Headquarters don't know. Men dash into the offices

of the head of the firm. The head of the firm jabbers incoherently.

Who's winning? Who's losing? No one knows.

One man buys a yacht.

Another commits suicide.

The grasshopper keeps on clicking through the summer's day. The grasshopper doesn't know anything about civilization.

On Monday, June 13th, a wave of consternation washed over The Pit. *Vonda's Review*, the Tompkins column and *Hay, Grain & Feed* printed curious estimates of the visible supply. The visible supply—since Saturday it was greater by fifteen million bushels!

Why?

There was hardly time to wonder. Immediately after opening July was under pressure. It was at 85½—the pegged price. Then it slipped an eighth. And a quarter. In a little while it yielded to 84¾.

Were the clique men letting him sell, Thane asked himself. No! The resistance was too bitter, too steadfast. Slowly, July sagged under the force of a broadside bombardment. Slowly, July was hammered down to 83¼. And the option for September delivery, acting in sympathy with July, tumbled three points from its price of the previous Thursday.

All day long the relentless cross-fire went on. After closing neither the bears nor the corner makers showed any exuberance. Both sides were severely worn.

Thane, moody and tired, went to his office. There he found a note from Zena Albans, telling him that the clique was in financial difficulty.

Still didn't know whether or not he could trust that woman, he reflected. But like as not, she was telling the truth. For if the bulls weren't in trouble, why hadn't they forced the issue?

He drove over to the Chippewa National to see Otis.

"George," he said, "it looks as though they're in the soup."

"You're right, Tha'," Otis told him. "Voss and Gottschalk and myself have made so much trouble for the American Exchange and for the Fidelity, that I don't think they dare put any more money into this thing. They're in a bad way."

"I reckon, George, I'll cripple 'em to-morrow."

"Going to shoot your wad, eh?"

"More'n that," Pardway replied, thinking of the master-stroke he had not yet confided to any one. "Now, I tell you what I want you to do. If by hook or crook you can hold up checks that Kershaw, Lamson, Rosenfeld or any of those boys may draw—do it! Make trouble for 'em at their banks. And get Voss and Gottschalk busy on this right away. I got my mind full of a lotta things."

He went back to his office, and dictated a short note to Wilkins, a copy of which that young man was to deliver to Vonda, Tompkins, Hamilton Argus and Will Ewing. These worthies were told to meet him at his brother's home at eight o'clock.

He then gathered all the available facts and figures as to the state of the market and tramped over to The BAZAAR. He wanted to reconsider every possible factor with the only person he could fully trust.

"Haven't used much of your money yet, Danny," he told his brother. "And I hope I won't have to. If I do, it's all going to-morrow. It's make or break now."

"Why do you say that, Tha'?"

"Well, you see, we busted right through their July peg to-day. And if we don't bust through the whole damn corner to-morrow, I guess they've got us."

"Anything wrong, Tha'?"

"No," the speculator responded wearily, "ain't nothin' wrong. But if you'll just grab a pencil and work along with me for a little while, you'll see how things stand."

For half an hour the brothers sweated over the problem

of the clique's holdings. Then Thane announced, "Sixteen million bushels of cash wheat, Danny? Can you beat it! They're holding all that—besides about ten millions in futures! Holy Moses! Twenty-six million bushels!" Half in a daze, he mopped his large brow.

"Have you the faintest notion," Daniel wanted to know, "of how much more they must absorb in order to complete their corner?"

The Great Bear hardly dared answer. And then, telling himself that he must face the situation, he replied, "Three million bushels. That's the real visible supply!"

"Three million bushels, Tha'? Three million bushels! Why—why you don't mean it!"

"It's true," Thane responded dreamily. Many a slip between cup and lip, he was thinking.

"What's the matter with you, Tha'? My God, man, don't you realize that we're done for?"

"Sit down," Thane ordered. Sorta funny, he thought, how the outbursts of other men never moved him. Probably did too much outbursting himself. "The visible supply," he began, "is only three million bushels. Don't matter. First place, I've got this visible supply so damned confused that nobody really knows what it is. I hardly know myself. Maybe it ain't three million. Maybe there ain't any visible supply. Maybe they've made their corner—and I don't know it. But," he insisted, seeming to come to life, "but if I don't know it—they don't know it either."

Well, Daniel was telling himself, there was two hundred thousand dollars thrown away. Two hundred thousand dollars in the hands of this maniac, this maniac that wasn't himself. What was the matter with Tha', anyhow? Why didn't he shout and swear and bluster? Did he feel himself licked already? What was the matter?

"Why, good God, Tha'!" Daniel cried. "Do you realize that they only need three hundred thousand dollars to margin under the visible supply?"

"Yes," Thane agreed, "that's so. But you want to re-

member that they have to do more than buy up those three million bushels. They have to support the market on their twenty-six million bushels. And if they couldn't do it to-day, there's no damn good reason to believe they'll be able to do it to-morrow." He sighed. "You see, Danny, you got the wrong idea about this thing. So has everybody else. You all think that this'll be decided by what happens in The Pit. You're wrong. It'll be decided by what happens in the different banks that Lamson and Rosenfeld and Albright have their accounts in. And by what'll happen in Cincinnati to-morrow. I'm not really fightin' this battle in Chicago, Danny. I'm fightin' it in Cincinnati."

"What's in Cincinnati?"

"In Cincinnati," Thane returned, "are men to whom I've paid over twenty thousand dollars. They're goin' wreck the Fidelity."

"Suppose it isn't wrecked?"

"No use s'posin'. Because no matter if she fails or not, the word will come out to-morrow in The Pit that it's all over with the Fidelity."

"Suppose it doesn't come out?"

"Now on that," Thane replied, his face assuming its grim vigor for a moment, "on that there's no s'posin'. I've taken the privilege of calling a meeting to-night at your house. No reason why you shouldn't attend. When you get there, you'll see how smart fellahs work."

For all his annoyance at his brother's tart answers, for all that he told himself he was a fool to have gotten into this thing—Daniel now understood why Thane was resting back so complacently. Tha' was evidently trusting to some thoroughly unexpected maneuver that would strike the corner to its heart. And still—"You're crazy!" he shouted. "No matter what you've got up your sleeve—it won't work. You can't spring it fast enough. They'll buy up those three million bushels, probably, the first half-hour. You're plumb out of your head, that's all!"

"Shouldn't be surprised but what they will," Thane

granted. "They'll *have* to buy all we offer. And after I get things fixed with the newspapermen at your house, I'm agoin' out to round up every man jack that's sellin' aside o' me. And we throw everythin' to-morrow morning. Right at the bell, see?"

For once in his life Daniel Pardway was listening to the unbelievable. This whole interview, in fact, seemed dismal and lifeless to him. That brother of his was sure sick. "You mean to tell me," he demanded, his pinkish cheeks gone ashen, "you mean to tell me you're going to sell at the bell? And let them complete their corner?"

The Great Bear smiled a vain, winsome, arrogant smile. "Let 'em?" he echoed softly. "Why, Dan'l, I'm goin' make 'em. I'm goin' make 'em complete their corner. But understand me. Even when they've done it—they won't know it. For the minute, they've bought up all the wheat—word'll come that it's all over in Cincinnati. And we'll keep on sellin' and hammerin' it down. Why, I tell you, by noon to-morrow I expect that everything will be down at least ten points. That'll wipe out every penny of margin they've posted in the last week."

Daniel was aghast. "I never heard the like of this!" he shouted scathingly. "And I tell you, I was crazy for comin' in with you!"

Thane nodded. "This is a big matter," he pronounced heavily. "Takes a remarkable man to handle it. Me—I'm remarkable."

Daniel pursed his thin lips. "You're remarkably crazy," he snapped.

Even so, he told himself, there was something wonderful about Tha's crazy gamble. If it could work, that is, if it could work—

"Nev' mind any more of your bright ideas," Thane was saying. "We got just enough time to catch a bite to eat, and then meet those newspaper fellahs."

Two hours later Daniel was seated in his library. Vonda,

Tomkins, Argus and Will Ewing were gathered about him. The Great Bear, trudging up and down the soberly furnished room, was holding forth.

"Gentlemen," he was saying with vast unconcern, "I'm under obligation to every one of you." This, he told himself as he tucked his thumbs into his waistcoat, was a sympathetic way to begin. "And it's up to me, gen'men, to make some return. Now I'm sorry to say that I'm not able to do very much for you at this moment. But as you're all members of the press, nothin' ought to please you more than a good story. An' that, gentlemen, is what I hope to give you."

After an impressive pause he continued with due solemnity. "I expect, gen'men, that you'll keep this story under your hats if you don't print it. And if you do—I expect you'll leave me out of it. That'll be all the reward I ask.

"The Kershaw Corner, gentlemen, will go blooey to-morrow. That's number one. The Fidelity Bank of Cincinnati is goin' to fail to-morrow. That's number two. I think wheat prices are going to fall for an average of more than ten points. That's number three."

For a minute there was a heavy, unbroken silence.

"An' now, gentlemen, if you will kindly go to your respective offices and get these stories written, and ready to be shoved in the moment the telegraph wires start humming—I think you'll have done a good night's work."

He slumped into a chair, and reached for the whisky and soda. His manner indicated that he had finished.

A shower of incredulous questions descended upon him.

The Great Bear, retaining an aspect of Olympian omniscience, said very little more. No, he really could not go into details. No, there was no great responsibility devolving on them. He did not expect them to print these stories until the dispatches from Cincinnati told of the run of Harper's Fidelity. Yes, such news could be expected to-morrow morning. No, they would have to excuse him, but

he was in no position to reveal the source of his information. He was very sorry. Yes, that would be about all.

In a few minutes a puzzled group of editorial wiseacres bowed themselves out.

Daniel, hardly knowing what to make of this curious sequence of events, offered no comment. After pouring himself a drink and slowly emptying the glass he ventured, "Now what?"

The Great Bear picked up his hat. "I'm going to a telegraph station," he said. "And I'm going to send six or seven wires to Cincinnati, each to a different person. Every one of those fellahs knows what he's supposed to do. And every one of 'em will do it. One of these fellahs, a man named Edgelow, has a gang of about a thousand people. Every one in that gang has a three or four dollar deposit at the Fidelity. Edgelow will round 'em up. To-morrow morning they'll all be standing in front of that bank. They'll all be hollering bloody murder. And the good people of Cincinnati, seeing that, will think there's a run on the Fidelity. And they'll make a bee-line for their pass books. And they'll stand in front of that bank and they'll holler bloody murder. And as soon's that starts going—my newspaper men in Cincinnati will burn up the wires. And in a few minutes the whole world'll know there's a run on the Fidelity. As soon as that comes in over the wires—these gentlemen here to-night will release their stories. What's more, the wires running straight into The Pit will carry the word—

"My Christ!" he exploded. "Do you s'pose anybody in that Pit, whether they're with me or not— Do you suppose anybody will resist the temptation to sell when that news comes in?"

"But," Daniel began, "but suppose—"

The Great Bear tilted his varnished straw hat down over his forehead. "I got no time to talk to people," he growled, "who're so afraid their pants'll burn up—that they wear Firemen Suspenders."

And with that sally he trundled out of the door, and made for the nearest telegraph station.

That night he could hardly sleep.

Before dawn he dressed, left his rooms at the Palmer House, and walked up and down the muddy banks of the North River. As much as he was intent upon all the factors at work upon the world of the wheat—he was at this moment infinitely more curious about himself.

How had it happened that in the last few days he felt hardly a tremor as to the outcome of this business?

Truly, he told himself, it was a thing to marvel at. He need no longer think! He need no longer feel! He was so attuned to the situation that he could execute the necessary stroke at the given moment—without bothering his brain about it. He could thank other people for that, all those other people who had tried to obstruct his course—and in so doing, had defined it.

His brother's disapproval, the fears of Agnes, his double betrayal through her and Zena Albans, the distrust of Hutchinson, the amazement and bewilderment of his own allies and henchmen, the grim hatred of Frank Lamson, the disdain of Orville Albright—all these were like little wheels turning about within him, little wheels grinding contrariwise to the one great wheel of his egoistic purpose. And as all the little wheels ground the more furiously against him—the one great wheel of his egoistic purpose whirled about faster and faster, swung more surely and surely into its course!

Why should he think? Why should he feel? Other people thought and felt for him!

Wasn't it wonderful, he asked himself proudly, wasn't it truly wonderful?

An hour before opening he was down at the Board of Trade. So was B. P. Hutchinson.

"Hutch," he said, "I'm going to sell as soon as the trading gets under way. You better do the same."

The old man fumed away in silent distaste.

Thane approached the sweeper, proffered a cigar, and good naturedly inquired, "Hank, how d'you think we'll make out to-day?"

For three-quarters of an hour he exchanged confidences with the janitorial dignitaries. But all the while he was intent upon what went on about him, the manner in which Hutchinson greeted Nat Jones, the all-important aspect of the Rosenfeld traders, the jaunty greeting Alton Beecher addressed to 'Parson' Lerch—

Just before opening he gathered Lassmann, Beecher, and his own floor-traders about him, and instructed them as to what they were to do. And then, telling Wilkins to keep close beside him, he stationed himself at the side-lines.

A huge selling movement was launched at the bell. Hutchinson, in the very thickest of the trading, was making a great show of offering huge lots.

Cash wheat, opening at 92, slipped to 90 in a few minutes.

"Ninety for cash, ninety for cash, ninety for cash!" the bears cried.

In an instant Thane became thrillingly alive.

Something was wrong!

There were no takers!

Slowly, two, three, four, five traders who worked for bull firms, wormed their way out of The Pit, looked about at those on the side-lines, and then broke into a run.

Now Thane understood. These men felt that they should have supported the market at 90. But they didn't! No supporting orders had come, evidently. And that's why they had rushed out—probably to headquarters, to ask for advice—

He was not the only one to realize what had happened. Instantly, the bears began to claw their prey.

Now ten, now fifteen of the clique firms' traders rushed

out. The bulls were in retreat. But they were not routed. Frank Lamson and Maurice Rosenfeld were heroically trying to absorb the huge avalanche of offerings.

It occurred to Thane that he might force an immediate capitulation. To appeal to Lamson was out of the question. But Rosenfeld? 'Rosie' had always more or less respected him. He had always more or less liked 'Rosie.' If he could only—

He smashed his way through to Rosenfeld, grabbed him, took hold of those frantic arms. "You're crazy to go on with this!" he shouted. "They've run out on you—"

But Rosenfeld, maddened and at bay, with tears of fury rolling down his cheeks, screamed back, "Let go, let go!" He tore away from the Great Bear's grasp, crying, "If you want to sell, Pardway, I'll buy!"

"You'll buy," the Great Bear muttered, "you'll buy! Well, by Christ, we'll see what you'll buy!"

His huge arms swung aloft. His stertorous shout rang up to the rafters. "Sell a million July!" he roared. "Sell a million July at 88! 87! 86! A million July at 86!"

White, staring, unbelieving—Frank Lamson accepted the offer.

Thane, feeling that Lassmann, Beecher and his own traders would only be confused by his being in their midst, made his way back to the side-lines. For a moment he forgot the confusion about him. And he thought of the pale, bewhiskered, austere old man who sat in his outer office, a wreck of what he had once been, a man who once had cried, "Sell a million!" And he paused to wonder if he would end up like 'Sell a Million' Selfridge.

But he had no time for any such thoughts. Already July was tumbling, two, three, four points. In a few minutes it had been hammered down to 80—and Frank Lamson left The Pit.

And now Rosenfeld, wiped out on the July sector, was single-handedly attempting to bolster cash wheat. At one time the wavering lines of battle carried Rosenfeld quite

near to where Pardway stood, and the lone bull standard-bearer's, "92 for cash! 92 for cash!" reached his ears—sounding like nothing less than the whelp of a crazed, wounded beast not knowing when he was beaten.

Now a condition prevailed that Thane ordinarily regarded as impossible. On one side of The Pit Rosenfeld was buying cash wheat at 92. And at the other Hutchinson, Brega, Jones, Beecher, Lassmann and a host of smaller bears were offering July at 81 and 80.

The thing to do, Thane decided, was to lick Rosenfeld at whatever game he was playing. "Wilkins," he snapped, "run in there and tell our men to hammer June. Never mind July! Sell cash wheat as long as Rosenfeld buys!"

In a few minutes cash wheat toppled five points. And then another five. And Rosenfeld's margins on the wheat he had bought fifteen minutes ago—were now wiped out!

Thane made for a phone and called George Otis. "They're wiped out on June and July!" he shouted. "But this sucker Rosenfeld looks as if he's still got more fight in him. He might even margin under the market. Now get after his bank right away, see? And tie him up—"

"He's tied," Otis shouted back, "hog-tied. I attended to that the minute the Chicago National opened this morning. And we just got word that there's a run on the Fidelity. That's why they've all quit—"

"Just give the Chicago National another ring," Thane insisted. "And tell 'em to watch that Rosenfeld account."

He smashed the receiver onto the hook, and hurried back to The Pit. Already Rosenfeld was shakily drawing several checks.

Thane, glancing at his watch, was amazed. All this had transpired in less than an hour. His wonderment was cut short by a sudden shout:

"The Fidelity's failed!"

"The Fidelity's failed!"

Immediately the note of disaster was chorused by a thou-

sand throats. For a minute the trading floor was practically deserted. Men rushed to the news tickers.

"Yah! Sure enough!"

"Busted! The Fidelity's busted!"

"C'mon! We got 'em going now!"

The trading picked up sharply.

Rosenfeld, and a horde of small-fry who felt that there must be a rebound, kept on buying cash wheat. But despite these desperate attempts at bolstering the market, in a few minutes the quotation tumbled to 77.

At this juncture word went around that the Chicago National had refused to honor a Rosenfeld check!

"Rosie's checks are bounding back!"

"The rubber check!"

"He's gone!"

"Busted!"

"Broke."

At 11:30 Rosenfeld gave up the ghost.

A few minutes later it was rumored that Maurice Rosenfeld & Co. would be forced to suspend.

The indicator swung back and forth like an inverted pendulum.

A little past noon, George Stone, secretary of the Board of Trade, appeared in the gallery, and rapped for order. Then he gravely announced that Maurice Rosenfeld & Co. could not meet its obligations.

Utter silence reigned. The Pit was stunned.

And then, because of the feeling that Kershaw was also likely to suspend, the July delivery slipped to 74.

Shortly before one o'clock the Secretary again made his appearance. He announced the temporary suspension of C. J. Kershaw & Co., adding a personal statement from the head of the stricken firm, "To the best of my knowledge I'm solvent."

Somehow this infuriated Thane. "To the best of his knowledge," he muttered, "to the best of his knowledge. Well, we'll knowledge him, we will."

He sent for Silas Dore. "Si," he said, "that fellah don't seem to know where he stands. Guess you better give him a little information. Sell a million." He nodded grimly. "Maybe that'll learn him."

This added wave of short-selling carried cash wheat down to its low of the day, 72½.

Hutchinson, who had been frantically selling, now turned bull. When Thane remonstrated with him, the old man mumbled, "72½! My, my! Wheat's worth more than that. She'll be up before the day's over."

It was, Thane told himself, a fair prediction. Probably there would be a rebound. But even so, it was a lousy, buzzardly trick, this snatching at a few pennies. What's more, Hutch's going bull might strengthen the market—

"FIDELITY FAILS! GREAT CORNER SMASHED!" the newsboys were crying through the streets, "GREAT CORNER SMASHED AS FIDELITY FAILS!"

At the very moment these shouts were resounding through the Board of Trade Building, the news tickers were rattling off a denial. No, the telegraphed advices insisted, the Fidelity had not failed. True, there had been something of a run on the bank—

Didn't make any difference, Thane reflected. As far as this day's work in The Pit was concerned, the Fidelity might as well have failed. The original rumor had done the work.

At 2:15 Secretary Stone again took his perch in the gallery and pounded for order. He announced the failures of E. W. Bailey & Co. and Hammil & Brine.

Hardly a ripple was caused by these bombshells. Anything was expected. And yet, wasn't Bailey a strong firm, financially well buttressed? And Hammil & Brine! There was no stronger member. It's guiding head, George C. Brine, was even a director of the Board of Trade!

Thane was not a little disappointed. Why didn't Orville Albright fail? And Lamson & Biggers? They were the ones he was gunning for. His victory, no matter how

profitable, would be incomplete unless they went to smash under this avalanche of fallen prices! And why didn't Peter McGeoch, who surely had bought heavily, why didn't he tumble? And why didn't John T. Lester, and Norton & Worthington, and Pickering & Co.—why didn't they bite the dust? Were they all margining under the market? Did they hope to recoup their losses to-morrow?

As he was counting over these possibilities, Thane realized that the rebound was in progress. Cash wheat, aided by margin posting, short covering, Hutchinson's veering to the bull side, and another dispatch confirming the fact that the Fidelity was weathering the gale—cash wheat snapped back to 74.

Before closing, a fairly strong bullish sentiment prevailed. There were rumors to the effect that the clique had secured more money and new backers. But to add to the confusion of the issue, Maurice Rosenfeld & Co. issued a statement which read:

“The money just gave out. The backers of the clique made promises they seemingly couldn't fulfill.”

The closing bell clanged. The Great Bear, glancing over the official recorder's statement, noted that a hundred million bushels of wheat had been traded in in six hours, and decided to call it a day.

He went to his office. “Ain't in to Jesus Christ Himself,” he barked.

He had hardly put his feet up on the desk, but what Alton Beecher wanted to see him. Then Lassmann. Then Hutchinson. “Tell 'em to get the hell outa here!” he stormed at Wilkins. “Tell 'em I'll send for 'em when I'm good and ready.”

In a few minutes Tompkins, Argus and Will Ewing arrived, all demanding interviews. He refused to be seen. “Looka here, you spavined pup!” he shouted at Wilkins.

"I ain't to be seen, see? Now get that straight—or you'll go home with your neck in a sling."

But he was not to be left to himself. Lassmann persisted, and was shortly shown in.

"Tha'," he said, "Armour is offering 95 for Kershaw paper. Don't you think there's a chance we should make a little someding? Armour wouldn't do it unless Kershaw's good for it."

The Great Bear sat up sharply. "That so? Well, well! Don't you take a dollar's worth. You go home and give yourself a good rest. I'm busy."

As he dismissed Lassmann a note from Zena Albans arrived. She must see him immediately. There was something he must know.

Before visiting her, he decided, he would drop in on George Otis and settle this Armour business.

In a few minutes he was seated in the sanctum of the president of the Chippewa National.

"Great day!" Otis exclaimed heartily, "You're a wonder, Tha'."

"Nev' mind!" Thane called sharply. "Armour is offering ninety-five cents on the dollar for Kershaw paper."

"Looks good to me," Otis replied. "Think I'll do it myself."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Thane stated wearily. "You'll offer 96. Maybe 97."

"Good idea, Tha'. No use letting Armour have all of it. We'll go him a cent better and get a lot more—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind." Pardway eyed his man. "Now listen, George. I got a lot o' work to do this evenin'. An' I'm a little outa breath. So don't make me repeat."

"There's only one reason you'll offer 96 or 97. To get 'em flockin' in here. And I want 'em flockin', see? You spread it high and low that you're bidding higher than Armour. And get Gottschalk and Voss to do the same. And when people come troopin' in here with Kershaw's

paper—you'll put out the big mitt. And smile. And say you're very sorry. But the banks're so glutted with Kershaw paper that she's slipped to 90. And get Gottschalk and Voss to do the same. And say that Gottschalk's Hamburg-American and the Columbia Loan & Trust may be offering more. And by the time these fellahs are peddlin' their paper to Gottschalk and Voss—they're to offer 85 or 80. And keep on passin' the buck until Kershaw's paper ain't worth its weight in smoke."

Otis tugged at his whiskers. For a moment he looked soggy, sour and disheartened. "Tell me, Tha', did you have anything to do with the run on the Fidelity?"

Thane briefly outlined the work of his Cincinnati agents.

Otis listened stolidly. "You've got more market sense than any man alive," he declared in petulant admiration. "But you're a wrecker, Tha'. A wrecker! I don't mind squeezing a bank. If they're sound they can stand it. But starting a run. Why—why that's plain panic!" Good Lord, he was saying to himself, suppose some one had done that to him!

"O, Christ!" Thane fumed, "don't get moral. Ain't you made a pile of money to-day?"

"A big pile," Otis granted solemnly. "And I'd just as lief not go on with this. Can you let me out of it?"

The Great Bear stood up and bellowed. "No, I can't! This ain't over by a long shot. And until it is—you stand to lose every penny you've put in!

"Now hurry up and do as I say about Kershaw paper, or you'll hear from me!"

And slamming his hat down on his head, he swaggered out.

What would Otis have thought, he asked himself as he drove down to Zena Albans', what would Otis have thought if he knew the clique had *made their corner*?

Good Lord Christ! They had made their corner ten times over, only to have their margins wiped from under

them. If that rumor about their having more money and new backers were true—

As soon as Mrs. Albans greeted him, he demanded, "What's so awful important that I must know about it immediately?"

She smiled, wound her train about her shoes, and leaned back on the chaise longue. "Won't you be seated, Thane?"

"Listen here," he sang out, "I ain't got time to go through all these female do-funnies. If you got anything to say, cough it up."

"Aren't you sweet, Thane?"

"Yah! I'm sweet." He poked a large black cigar into his mouth. "Come on, sister, cough it up!"

"Thane, are you through selling?"

"Nope."

"Don't you think wheat is depressed below its actual value?"

"Maybe."

"Well, then, is there any sense in your continuing to sell?"

"Reckon not." He blew a smoke ring over her head. "Wasn't any sense in my selling this morning. Reckon I was up against the biggest bull combine we've seen in these parts. What's more, there ain't any sense in my being here. Swazie and my ward might walk in on me—even if Lamson won't." Better let that sink in, he told himself. And by the way her eyelashes flickered, it was sinking. "I'm a funny fellah," he concluded, "I do lots of things that haven't any sense. Most of the time they turn out to be pretty smart."

"I was in Frank Lamson's office to-day," she told him. "At about two o'clock. And he was convinced that if he could margin under the market—wheat would come back in a day or two."

Thane yawned. "Where they.gonna get the money? By selling Kershaw's paper, I s'pose?" Right now, he assured himself, Kershaw's paper wasn't worth 85.

"Yes," she went on, "they'll sell Kershaw's paper. And besides, there's more money coming from Cincinnati! Kershaw and Lamson will margin below the market."

Impassive as he seemed, a number of harrowing notions coiled about the Great Bear's brain. What was he to do, he asked himself. Wheat could hardly be depressed another point. Only by some paralyzing stroke, utterly unheard of, utterly unlooked for, swift and terrible in its vindictiveness—only by such a stroke could he deal the death blow to this Kershaw Corner. Only by such a stroke could he save himself.

What was he to do? He had played his last card in the run on the Fidelity. False figures, pestering, even getting the exchange to close—those would not avail. He must somehow tie up this new money. And that, seemingly, was impossible. For if they had funds large enough to protect their holdings—they must have over a half million dollars!

"How big is their wad, Zena?"

"Six hundred thousand dollars."

He'd stop this—even if he had to stage a train robbery!

"How's it goin' get here?"

"As I understand it, Thane, it's here already."

Hm. They must have wired it. "Where is it?"

"At the American Exchange National."

"In whose name?"

"Kershaw's."

For several minutes he chewed his cigar. "Why are you tellin' me this?" he wanted to know. "Did Lamson put you up to it? Is this their way of scarin' me outa the market?"

She passed her hand back of her billowing hair. She smiled, almost to herself. Her warm eyes swam away from him. Here was a lovely, inscrutable wanton whose every mannerism evoked some racy fever in his blood.

"Perhaps," she was saying, "perhaps I'm merely acting in Lamson's interest. Or perhaps I'm trying to save you from certain defeat."

The stricture of an impotent desperation slowly choked off his thoughts. Only this morning he had marveled at a state of supreme efficacy in which he need not think or feel. Now, in his bewilderment at this unforeseen circumstance, the fear of being beaten overtook him—a great, abysmal animal fear that bellowed about in his brain.

“Christ Almighty,” he cried, “you ain’t got the soul of a snake! It ain’t bad enough that you betray me in order to help out Frank Lamson, but here you are betraying Frank Lamson just to—” he was too angry to find words. “Christ,” he sputtered, “it ain’t even to help me! It’s just to knife him and drive me crazy.”

His purplish, swollen face, aflame with a mighty wrath, its small shiny eyes, its mashing lips, its scowling jowl—this face of a furious dismay and a helpless pride stared into hers. Then he lunged toward her. His huge hand flew up.

He had expected to see her as she was at the Richelieu, cringing, and convulsed by fear. But now there was not the slightest tremor. She sat, unmoving, entrancing, her eyes brimming with a rare ecstasy. “Are you going to hit me?” she asked quietly.

He poked his hand into his pocket. He had not intended to strike her. He had merely wanted to see her cowering before him. But now he was revolted by his own brutishness, sickened by his own abysmal fear, shamed by the feeling that he could not face her. For had he not seen something in her eyes, some fervid resignation that had more than once emanated from Agnes? Agnes, poor little girl. Where the devil was she? Still puttering away at those funny figures, probably. And wondering how the devil Kershaw and Lamson could have made their corner—and not been able to support it. Or—

Well, he couldn’t think about her now. Though by golly, there was a woman who could love. Yes, sir, she could love! But not this queer woman rubbing her knee against his. Though she wanted to love him. He could see that. And she wanted to help him. But she didn’t know how.

She just couldn't help being a dirty, mean, tricky animal with a frozen heart and a passionate look.

She sighed plaintively. "Why didn't you hit me?"

"Give you too much satisfaction."

"If I were the sort of woman who cries," she said, "I'd cry."

Well, he reflected, he had to get his mind on his business.

"In whose name did you say that money was?"

"Kershaw's."

Hm. Rosenfeld had carried the brunt of the battle to-day. To-morrow, it seemed, was Kershaw's turn. "How about Lamson?" he wanted to know. "Is he gettin' any of this foreign money? Or doesn't he need it?"

"It's each man for himself now," she told him. "I think Lamson will be given enough money to hold out through a selling session in the morning. And if it goes their way, of course, they'll win back everything they've lost, and more. But as far as I know, most of that six hundred thousand dollars is at Mr. Kershaw's disposal."

"Aren't they goin' help Rosenfeld?"

"I don't think so. They feel that he was foolish to keep on buying to-day."

"But look here," Thane cried. "He did all their fighting for 'em."

"Don't you think," she asked softly, "that they would have been better off if he hadn't done so much fighting?"

"Why, sure," he agreed, "if you look at it that way. My God, Zena, what a bunch of cut-throats. To steam up an argument like that for a man who did their battling!"

She lifted her shoulders carelessly.

"Thanks," he said tartly, "thanks." And telling himself that he couldn't profit by remaining here, he rose to go.

For hours he tramped about town, pondering over the matter. Rosenfeld, he told himself, Rosenfeld. Somehow the man was the weak link in the bull chain. Here he had failed outright. And the clique was cutting him adrift. Probably, he had some claims on those fellows. And prob-

ably, he felt mean, mean. And by golly, it wasn't right to throw him over like excess cargo on a sinking ship.

Rosenfeld, Rosenfeld!

He repeated the name so many times that it became quite meaningless to him.

Then suddenly his breathing quickened. He felt his brain abroil. At last! He had it, he had it, he had it! He'd get 'em roped like a maverick at a round-up. Here's where he'd butcher 'em. Here's where he'd paralyze 'em. Here's where he'd sell 'em to hell. Here's where the Kershaw Corner would be a scotched snake.

He jumped into a cab, and directed the driver to Judge Brechtenhauer's home.

Tuesday morning, Thane got to the Board of Trade a little after opening. As he came in, Secretary Stone was reading a statement from the official spokesman of the bull clique:

"Gentlemen:

We are prepared to pay all our clearing house differences and to margin below the market.

C. J. KERSHAW & Co."

The gallery greeted this announcement with cheers. Funny, Thane said to himself, there wasn't any outburst yesterday. It looked like a packed gallery. And why the devil were all these friends of Kershaw's there—unless he had really promised them fireworks?

When the cheering died down, the Secretary solemnly read off a list of those who had made overnight communication to the effect that all trades with them must be closed. Among these were:

J. McCleary & Co.

J. H. Yorke & Co.

M. C. Orr.

But the buoyancy of The Pit was hardly affected by these

funereal rites. It was felt that Kershaw's stability, which had been widely advertised overnight, would restore normalcy.

As the trading got under way, cash wheat opened at 75½. It mounted slowly. The panic seemed averted. As the bulls took courage with this steady regaining of lost ground, one of the most powerful manipulators in the country came to their support. Phil Armour, still at large despite the newspaper embargo, was backing up his bid for Kershaw's paper by buying in huge lots.

A number of bears, not certain of their course, and feeling that prudence might be advisable, surrounded Thane and asked his opinion.

"Go in there and sell," he snorted. "Go on, I tell you, sell. And for every bushel you sell—I'll sell two."

Wheat had touched 77½ before the bears made any concerted counter-attack. It rose to 78⅛ as the Armour men took all offers. And then, inexplicably, Murray Nelson & Co., who had been heavy buyers yesterday, suddenly began to sell short by the hundreds of thousands of bushels. It was time, Thane told himself, time to throw everything into the balance.

He took Lassmann by the arm, walked him out of the building and down the block. "Felix," he said, "Rosenfeld got an awful rotten deal from that crowd. Now we're in a position to do him a favor. And if he accepts our help, he'll be doin' somethin' for us, see?"

"Now shut up! I'm talkin'. There's six hundred thousand dollars to Kershaw's account at the American Exchange National. Part of that, by rights, should be at Rosenfeld's disposal. And there's only one way of his gettin' it. He's got to tie that money up."

"How?"

"Garnishee, understand? He has to take out a court writ that gives him the right to tie up that money, get me? They can't pay it out until the writ expires. By that time he can file briefs, and—"

"Holy smokes!" Lassmann cried. "Holy smokes! But how can he get such a paper, Tha'?"

Thane took a sealed packet out of his pocket. "The court order is right here," he explained. "I want you to go over and give it to him. Last night I got Judge Brechtenhauer to sign it. Tell all that to Rosenfeld. Tell him all he has to do is serve it on the bank. Now hurry up, see! It ought to be all said and done in ten minutes." And entrusting the writ of garnishee to Lassmann, Thane returned to The Pit.

It was almost eleven o'clock. The firm note at opening had been dissipated. There was a quiet anxiety. In a few minutes the clearing house sheets had to be in, and the differences of the previous day settled.

Immediately after eleven the following suspensions were announced:

T. E. Balding & Co.

Crosby & Co.

Pickering & Co.

Orville Albright, Inc.

At last, at last, Thane was saying to himself. At last he had mowed down one of the men he had been stalking for months. But his glee was only momentary. He could not help being awed by Crosby's insolvency. Crosby! Why, he was thought financially impregnable!

At half-past eleven the Secretary reported the suspensions of:

M. B. Crofts & Co.

M. S. Robinson & Co.

Toward noon it was whispered about that Kershaw's funds had been tied up. Kershaw merely smiled and went on blissfully buying. But the rumor spread. It became the undertone of the market.

Kershaw was going to suspend! Kershaw, who had weathered yesterday, who had been solvent this morning, to whose aid Armour had come only two hours ago—this Kershaw with another fortune at his command was going to suspend! Why? He had not been undersold. His mar-

gins were still secure. All he needed was the money known to be at his beck and call—money, he had given his cohorts to understand, that his friend Egglestone would bring over before noon.

At ten minutes to twelve, Kershaw stopped trading. Kershaw looked about anxiously. Kershaw rushed to a phone. Kershaw went gray. Kershaw dropped the receiver. Kershaw leaned against the wall for support. Egglestone came tearing into the building, breathless and empty handed.

Why?

Suddenly The Pit was certain that Kershaw was doomed. The indicator, which had been striving upward, now fell back.

“He can’t make it!” the bears cried. “He’s done! Kershaw’s gone! He’s broke! Busted! Busted! Hi—the boy’s busted!”

The Great Bear was not party to this outburst. In his most sedate manner he approached the Secretary. “George,” he said, “we don’t want to take advantage of a slip-up. This fellah Kershaw’s got the money. Give him five minutes more. The money’ll be here.”

Such procedure was unheard of. Ever since the beginning of The Board of Trade, settlements had been made exactly at noon, or before. Nevertheless, in the face of a request coming from the one man who would profit most by the application of the rule, and in recognition of Kershaw’s popularity, the Secretary allowed five minutes to pass before taking any action.

At 12:05 the suspension of C. J. Kershaw & Co. was announced.

Now the rock upon which the corner had been built was plunging into the abyss, sweeping along with it:

J. H. Yourt & Co.

J. D. Eldridge & Co.

Hibbard & Co.

H. K. Matthews

Lamson & Biggers

Youst & Brady

Gregg & Co.

Hord Brothers & Co.

In a few minutes it was known that Rosenfeld had taken out a writ of garnishee. No one suspected that it was through Thane Pardway that the paralyzing blow had been struck. Only his kindness in prevailing upon the Secretary was known.

For the second time in two days, the wheat, world force that it was, had been vitally affected by the strategy of Thane Pardway. Now it stood at 69—wiping out the bull holdings purchased that morning, making it impossible for the clique to support any part of its vast holdings.

69, Thane was saying to himself, looking up at the indicator—69! That meant that the clique, and its individual members, faced an average loss of twenty cents on every bushel of nearly thirty million bushels. That meant a total loss of between six and seven million dollars. Well, God help 'em. The Kershaw corner was over. The wheat bubble had burst. Their cash wheat would be sold out under the hammer. Their futures—

He signaled Lerch. "Get hold of Frank Lamson and Orville Albright," he ordered. "Tell 'em to be over at my office at four o'clock. Tell 'em I may be in a position to do somethin' for 'em.

"And as for this wheat," he remarked dispassionately, "why that's all over. Don't sell another bushel."

As he was about to go, Felix Lassmann told him that Hutchinson was buying.

"The buzzard!" Thane exclaimed, half admiring the old man's shrewdness. True enough, he told himself, wheat would probably react. "What are the others doin', Felix?"

Lassmann said some of them were still selling.

"Tell you what you do, Felix. Tell 'em they better not sell her down much more. Anyway, I've quit. And as for you, why, if you got no more pride of position than Hutch—

you might do well to buy. And tell the boys I'll be over at the Palmer House to-night."

Nat Jones wanted to talk to him. Alton Beecher wanted to confer about something. Alex Geddes asked him if he had a minute. But Thane was bored and adamant. "The Great Bear," he announced, "has retired from his operations."

And so he left The Pit, feeling singularly dull, unmoved and alone. It seemed to him now that he had always been alone. Alone—weary and alone, even when the flood of fury swept him downstream along with all the other human flotsam and jetsam. Alone and heavy and tired and unthrilled.

O—well!

He dropped into his chair, put his feet up on the marquetry desk, and reached for the picture of Rosa Duveyne.

Nice girl!

Of course, not so nice. But still—nice girl, nice.

CHAPTER XXXVII

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

THE Great Bear felt shocked and bruised. All his senses seemed to have been rubbed raw. A dull clamor kept on hammering away in his head.

But he was not the man to succumb to the strain of success. Bit by bit, he began to piece his plans together.

For one thing, he told himself, he certainly had wrecked that corner. And like as not, made a mint of money. It was still too early to tell how much. Pretty soon he had to get hold of the newspaper men, and have them yowl about what a rotten gang of pirates had been undone. And then, to make doubly sure that the corner was dead and gone, he'd have to pile up additional troubles for that Cincinnati gang. Perhaps he could get Rosenfeld to sue Wiltshire, Eckert & Co. for breach of contract, criminal conspiracy, and about everything else on the calendar. And perhaps he could get a lot of other garnishee suits started. If he could throw the whole mess into the courts—the market would take care of itself.

He dictated a number of letters to Wilkins, letters that would set these final cogs into motion. Then he left his sanctum and peeked into one of the board-rooms. Hm. June had closed at 71, a gain of two points over the low of the day. Hutch had been right!

Well, no use thinking about that. As for himself, he was through. Had enough on his mind. First thing he had to do was get matters straightened out with Lamson and Orville Albright. And then he'd have to clear up that other mess in his life—Agnes.

Albright and Lamson came together. The Great Bear interviewed both of them at the same time.

"Now I may as well tell you boys," he began, "that I've been gunnin' for you right along. And I've had a number of your trades with other firms transferred to me. You've both announced temporary suspensions. And they can be temporary—if you've got the good sense to listen to me. I ordered my man Lerch to tell you that I might be in a position to help you out. And I will help you out—if you're willin' to listen to reason."

Albright's paled, drained, aloof face brightened a little.

Lamson, beaten but still bristling, snickered. "Doc," he jibed, "don't we get chloroformed before the operation?"

Thane smiled. "Got your nerve," he admitted, "talkin' to me like that. Howsomever," he went on busily, "I ain't got time to listen to a couple lame ducks bein' funny. Now looka here. Wheat's probably goin' up again. And I may margin below the market for you. Or take over some of your elevator receipts—if you act up sensible-like."

He turned to Albright. "Mr. Albright," he said, "I never knew what you had against me. 'Cept, maybe you didn't like the cut o' my jib. Well, that's all right. But you shouldn't 'a' made such a show of it." Albright wanted to interpose, but Pardway swept away all possible objections by a wave of his hand. "Listen to me, my boy. I'm doin' the talkin' to-day. And I don't want to be interrupted. I might lose my kindness o' heart."

He nodded, as if settling down to business again. "Now I'm in no mood for arguments. Albright, you recently built yourself a damn handsome house on Rush Street. I think a fair price for the ground, the building and barn, and all your furnishings is one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I've had friends tell me every picture and tapestry you've got. I know the value of every single piece. I've got a deed here. And a transfer of property agreement. And all that rigmarole. It's a fair price. And I can see by your face that you know it." He fingered a

document. "I had this made out weeks ago. Everything's ready." He flung the paper across the desk. "All you have to do is sign. Your friend Lamson here will witness it."

Albright demurred, protested, argued and suggested another sum.

Thane yawned and smiled to Lamson. "Ain't it funny," he observed, "the kind of an argument some people put up when they like your proposition?" He turned to Albright. "You've got one minute to sign," he decreed. "And don't try my patience."

Albright signed.

"I didn't want to do you out of money when you're down," Thane told him. "It's just that fellahs in your position oughtn't to have any pride. That's why I wanted to relieve you of the house. Besides, I like it." He yawned again. "You can go now."

Orville Albright humbly took himself off.

"That fellah," Thane remarked to Lamson, "for all his pretense at bein' a great gentleman, thinks I'm a damn fool for making him a reasonable price." He smiled to himself. "Guess I am."

"But that's neither here nor there!" he snapped, glaring at his old enemy. "Frank, I don't know what to do about you. You see, the other fellahs that're in the hole to me—why that's just a question of money. But you and Albright—you both crossed me. He crossed me in society. And you had the gall to go tamperin' with my women. And I sorta like fellahs that've got the guts to stand up against me. I sorta feel kindly disposed."

"You do!" Lamson spat out grimly. He was facing a loss of over three hundred thousand dollars. And, he felt, this was no time for a man to be twitted.

"Yes," Thane answered softly, "I do. Now I don't know how badly you've been cleaned. But I tell you what my li'l proposition is.

"You gave Zena Albans a house. As I understand it,

you own it. Deed's in your name." He halted, awaiting some affirmation. But Lamson, his cold, cat eyes intent upon the rug, sulked in silence. "Taking it hard," Thane observed. "Well, I'm making it a bit lighter for you. Zena's house, along with her horses and the victoria, along with all the furnishings—well, it's maybe worth between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars. And then she sports quite a bit of jewelry. And a lot of gowns. And all that.

"Tell you what I'll do. You draw up a list of what you've given her. And I'll take it all over now. And I'll take your own valuation. Figure it out right here and now. And I'll make out a check. And once that's done—you needn't as much as tell Zena good-by."

Lamson picked up his hat. "You can go plumb to hell," he said.

A hard man to deal with, Thane was telling himself. "Looka here, Lamson. You're likely to go stone broke. I'm giving you a chance to right yourself. Besides, a man like you has no right to bat around with a woman like Zena. You might give a thought to your wife and children."

Lamson laughed, a short, desperate, brutal laugh. "I'll see you in hell first," he declared. "I'll never give up the woman. And you can make the most of it." His brows lowered defiantly. And swiftly, he made his way out.

Thane buzzed for his secretary. "Wilkins," he said, "we hold a number of trades with Lamson & Biggers. Take 'em off our books. Then make a note of each and every one of 'em, go over to Lamson & Biggers and wait until you see Frank Lamson. Tell him what we've done. And present that memorandum with my compliments. Tell him that's my tribute to a man who doesn't know when he's down."

For the first time in weeks Thane went home and slept. The next day he rose at eleven, sleepily trotted over to his office. He knew, just a few minutes after entering the premises, that his assumption of the previous day was justified. The great corner had been smashed.

There were a few more suspensions, among them J. J. Bryant. But on the whole, the market was calm. Prices moved steadily within a narrow range. In the afternoon he dropped into The Pit. Trading was desultory. The indicator seemed glued to one spot.

Yes, the great corner had been smashed! Some of the firms that had suspended were trying to make good their losses. Others were involved in garnishee suits, and suits for breach of contract. The whole mess, as he had desired, was being thrown into the courts. And the long line of cash wheat that the clique had held, it was officially announced, would be sold under the hammer.

A single man, not through his knowledge and craft of the world of the wheat—but by his anarchic application of forces that ordinarily had no bearing upon the grain marts—this single man, tempestuous, brutal, domineering, wrecking, egotistic—had cut the Gordian knot of the Kershaw Corner. The Kershaw Corner—for years and years it was to be remembered by the giants who interwove their passions with the purposes of the earth. It was the only time in the history of the Chicago Board of Trade that the monster, Monopoly, had been struck to the heart by two mighty anarchical, unwheat-worldly strokes. Two mighty, anarchical strokes—they had almost wrecked one bank, withheld from another the right to honor the draft of its stockholder and largest depositor, swept three dozen strong firms into oblivion, started a landslide that tumbled down fifty titans, a thousand large speculators and ten thousand small-fry! Two mighty, anarchical strokes that in two days made more than eight million dollars for a handful of men! Two mighty, anarchical strokes that all but affected the destiny of the wheat eating peoples of the world!

All these matters, and many more that are too intricate, too manifold, too technical, too abstruse to chart here—all these were the work of Thane Pardway. And yet, to what gain? True, he made a million dollars. And he was half

successful in paralyzing the pride of two men who had taken him lightly. But for Albright's house he had paid nearly as much as it was worth. From Lamson, unflinching, brutal, bitter Lamson, he had wrested not a thing but a number of trade obligations—obligations that he would not profit by because of one of his clownishly sentimental seizures of goodfellowship.

To be sure, he had kept faith with himself. He had done that which he had wanted to do, that which the riotous fever of mastery in his veins charged him to do, that which his egotistic determination had made it necessary for him to do. His epileptic ego had thrown a panicky fit over the world of the wheat—and scared off those who wanted to watch him writhe.

And what more? Nothing.

His main objective—making himself unquestioned overlord of The Pit, had not been realized. Nor could any such realization be forced upon people. For in confusing the issues of the whole campaign, in perverting the facts attendant upon it, in harassing the members of the clique, in sharing the bull spoils in 'Frisco, in starting a run on the Fidelity, in tying up Kershaw's money—in all these cunning, secretive, anarchical measures, and in a thousand more—he had used so many agents that hardly one was conscious of the other's existence. What he had done was practically unknown!

Nor did he dare to make these calumnious measures public. He did not want to discredit Vonda, Tompkins, Argus and Will Ewing. Under no circumstances would he betray Saunders. As for Zena— Yes, he could give her away. But to what purpose? They would laugh at him if he said he had relied upon the say-so of a woman kept by Lamson. And could he broadcast his share in the Fidelity incident? Why, he would be crazy to do it, he told himself. They'd try him on charges of criminal conspiracy. Did he dare tell any one that he had given the bulls their

corner—and then smashed them by force of their additional load?

No, no! He must keep this haunting silence.

Of course, there was one thing he had gotten for his pains. The Great Bear—they called him, the Great Bear!

Hutchinson, because he made such a great show of selling, was being accorded some acknowledgment. And he lapped it up like a hungry alley-cat. And as for the other large shorts, now that victory was theirs, every one of the big guns was firing salutes in honor of himself, telling how he had done it! Still, they did call him 'Pride o' The Pit' Pardway, some of 'em did. And that, too, was half-joshing. More than one of them, hearing rumors as to the run on the Fidelity—which he was forced to deny, had taken up George Otis's cry, 'The Wrecker.'

On the whole, Thane saw, sentiment was against Hutchinson for the show he had made in selling. And sentiment was not in his favor either. The Great Bear, 'Pride of The Pit' and 'The Wrecker' did inspire a certain dread, and did make people watch their step and talk sociable-like. But no one thanked him for what he had done for the bear side.

Well, anyway, he told himself, there was no use nursing a grouch. How about giving a great spread for all the men who had put the thing across? He would invite every jack-tar of 'em, except Hutch. Yes, sir, he'd have Billy Linn, and Brega and Jones and Beecher and—

One had been hurriedly called away. Another had a sick baby. A third was spending these evenings in the bosom of his family, celebrating his victory. A fourth had already invited a number of his fellow bears. "Just going to ask you, Tha'," he said lamely.

"Thanks!" the Great Bear snorted, "I'm busy!"

He wheeled about and strode angrily down the street. Hell of a right any of 'em had to give the party, he was telling himself. It was he himself, Pride o' The Pit, Corner-Buster, The Great Bear, tribal and baronial boss of the

short side who ruled by might and main—he alone was privileged to throw a spread! And all the others should have gathered about his board like feudal retainers doing homage to the lord of the realm.

Bears—bah! They weren't worthy of the name. Wolves of the pack, that's what they were. No sooner had they been saved by his lion-hearted leadership, but what they struck their fangs into the stricken prey. And in their gluttonous lust they had forgotten not only about him—but about each other. Half of them, following Hutch's lead, had turned bull. And they all had seized their pickings, and parted company, each celebrating in his own way—

As for himself, he decided, he too wanted to celebrate, to share the fruits of victory. But with whom? Agnes? She was probably with Glen. And even if she weren't—he couldn't face her. And even if he could—she wouldn't be of a mind to celebrate. What could his triumph mean to her? Only a vindication of his having following the course he had set for himself—of his having followed that course despite all she had done to turn him back.

Zena Albans? Rosa Duveyne? Henrietta Beecher? Elsa Glynn? Women! Didn't want women, he told himself. He hadn't thought in terms of women for quite some while. And what was more, he didn't want to. It was one terrible, crashing man's battle he had fought and won. And he wanted to see a lot of men, all dressed up in starched shirts, with their big, hearty, shiny faces glowing with victory, eating and drinking— And maybe some one offering a toast to him, and saying he was one hell of a fine fellah who could do battle with a world of bulls— After all, it was only coming to him. And then, maybe, they'd sing *Auld Lang Syne*—and drink her down. And in the wee small hours, maybe, they could bring on a belly dancer who'd throw her pearls to the boys—

Not one, he told himself, there was not one. He could go back to the shadows—to the queer streets of a great city

acrawl with the creatures of the many half worlds. He could bust into Madame Lou's and buy the girls champagne. He could go down to 'One Toss' Taylor's and try to break the bank. Or carry off a gang of the losers and stand 'em up to the bar, making them forget old Lady Luck. Or—

Yep, lots of things he could do. Lots of pals he had, all right! But what he wanted were some of the boys he had made big money for. Some of his own people of The Pit. And of those—

Not one.

Vonda, Tompkins, Argus, and all the others for whom he had done so many favors and who had so recently made some return—he had to steer clear of them. They would go out with him, all right, all right! But they would wonder why he wasn't with the big guns—

Well, hell, he swore at himself. He was a lone man. He had always fought a lone battle. And now he'd have a lone celebration. He'd get so roaring drunk—

But as he stepped within the swinging doors of Smiling Charley's, he told himself that he couldn't go on with it. No—a king was not to be alone. He'd have a drink or two—and then—

But there was Hutch! The old buzzard himself! The one boy he wouldn't have invited to his big party. Old Hutch, and all alone.

"'Lo, old timer!" he cried. "Celebratin'?"

Hutchinson's filmy eyes stared out at him. The thin, bluish lips felt about for words. The gaunt, grizzled, shabby form swayed against the bar. "Don't like the way you've been talking to me, Pardway," came that scrappy tenor. "You'll live to regret it." And turning his unpressed back, Hutchinson jerkily ambled to the door.

Huh! Funny, it was funny! And yet, a man couldn't help but feel for the old buzzard. He too, in his heart of hearts, felt that he was the boy that had made the bulls back up. And he too was alone on this big night. He too

was sort of out of it socially because he didn't exactly give a damn for what other people thought—

Thane threw a hundred dollar bill at Smiling Charley. "Everybody up to the bar!" he called, waving his hand at the ill-assorted specimens who hovered in the shadows. And the motley crew swarmed about him, smiled emptily, and wondered what this sport had been drinking that made him burn up his money. Then some one whispered that it was . . . The Great Bear! And they stared, and wondered why *he* should have to do with such as they. . . .

Without waiting for his drink, Thane swaggered out. He walked for blocks and blocks. And for miles and miles. Swiftly, steadily, he circled about and about the heart of the city, as if it were a cage in which he was pent up. Then he made his way down Wabash Avenue.

Here and there he saw couples holding hands, kissing, caressing. The full, luscious moon dripped down with the golden honey of romance. And the night, ah, the night, he told himself, he loved the night. And the lovers were part of the night. Within the body of the night the lovers moved like glad secrets within one's heart. The lips of the lovers, and the hands of the lovers, and the sweet lies of the lovers, and the hand-swept hair of the lovers—all these were just notes that the gods of dreams were jotting down on the scroll of night.

And there was one—one, he could be sure, who was always waiting for him. Sad, brutal, sweet, shameless, terrible as was all that had been between them— Still she was waiting! Forever, she would be waiting! Forever, she would be waiting and longing. And her heart-hopes would be shuttling to and fro in the dream loom of night.

Aggy. Little Aggy. Maybe, now that the corner was over, he would make it all up to her. He need only want her—and she would come.

Such was the passion poem dedicated to his male mastery, a passion poem beat out on the boards of the wooden sidewalk as he turned the corner by his home. And there

at the door, he saw Glen Swazie bidding her good-night. And Glen Swazie's hands where his hands had been. And Glen Swazie's lips where his lips had lain.

And taking cover in the shadows, he heard the door close, and saw Swazie run singing down the street.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

APATHY

THE monstrous epileptic ego, gorged and sated with the Kershaw corner, had slunk back to its hiding place in Thane Pardway's primeval passions. There, in the animal underworld of this man's soul, it slumbered in dreamless, undesiring sleep.

The Great Bear, heavy and dank and dumpy as a lump of dough, sat unstirring through the days. He did not go down to his office. He did not drop into The Pit. And so, without his being aware of it, the dread he had inspired gradually dwindled.

His one preoccupation, these days, was moodily wondering why Agnes wouldn't marry Swazie right off. She now wore the boy's solitaire. Well, why didn't she get hitched, and be done with it?

"Because," she had told him. "Just—because."

Woman's reason aplenty, he thought. "Well," he asked, "when will you marry him?"

"O—in a year or two."

A year or two, he repeated to himself, a year or two! And all that while was she going to keep on fussing with these statistics he was no longer interested in?

She wouldn't leave. And he hadn't the heart to discharge her. What a mess, what a miserable mess!

And now Glen came very frequently. And Agnes always pressed his hand. And kissed him. And—and turned for a moment to gaze reproachfully at her guardian.

At such times a fierce, futile possessiveness took hold of Thane Pardway. But he managed to titter carelessly. And

then, after a few minutes, he would be telling himself that he didn't care.

But he did.

And once, irked by his desire for her, he said, "I want you to marry Swazie, and be quick about it. You know that, don't you?"

"I know it," she replied quietly, not taking her eyes from the chart.

Her gentle aloofness annoyed him. "I s'pose," he mumbled, "I s'pose you're angry at me because of what's been between us. I s'pose you blame me for it all. Guess you forget it takes two to make a bargain." He rose and sauntered toward her. For the first time in months he touched her, taking her head between his hands and turning it up to him. "I s'pose you can't forgive me for *betraying* you." He pronounced the word with a deep, brutal satisfaction.

She closed her eyes. Almost involuntarily she rubbed her cheeks against his hands. "It wasn't a betrayal then," she said. "It became that when you wanted to marry me off to another man."

So, he said to himself, this is what her sorrow has done for her. Now she was able to talk back at him. "It's very funny," he remarked, strolling about the room. "You women! You can forgive anything as long as we love you."

For several minutes he waited for her to speak. Then he stared at her, and saw a faint tinge of pink make its way over her face. "Why don't you say something?" he demanded.

She smiled up at him, a soft, sad, twisted smile.

Knew damn well why she didn't say anything, he told himself. There wasn't anything to be said. Something wonderful about that girl, all right. Suffering . . . and smiling; smiling . . . and suffering.

And Agnes, realizing that he would never feel at ease

until she had married, ventured, "Your conscience is troubling you. It's hard to do wrong, isn't it, Tha'?"

"You oughta know!" he sang out in unhappy defiance, and left the house.

Within several days he had perfected a plan intended to hasten the Swazie nuptials.

He dictated a long, sonorous document bulging with legal phrases and paraphrases, bristling with whereins, whereases and parties of first and second parts.

"Now you get this paper extra-legal looking," he told Wilkins. "And get a notary's seal on it. And some day soon I'll ask you for Father O'Hare's contract, see? And this is what you're to give me."

This preliminary measure having been executed, Thane sent for Swazie.

"Agnes tells me you're engaged," he said. "Now as I see it, there's only two sorts of people. Them as get engaged. And them as get married. Now if you mean business, you'd better hurry up about it."

Glen's flat eyes held a shadow of perplexity. "I thought you weren't favorably disposed toward me, Mr. Pardway. I never expected to win your consent."

"Well," Thane grumbled, "you see, it's this way. I got to protect my ward's good name, see? And you two—why you've gone 'round together so long— See what I mean? I don't want to start people talking." Who the devil cared enough about these people to gossip, he asked himself. Well, didn't matter. Have a little fun broiling Swazie over the coals. "Yes, sir!" he exclaimed sternly. "If you're serious in your intentions—marry the girl right off."

"But Mr. Pardway, I don't want a long engagement. It's Agnes."

"Sure!" Thane growled. "She got a right to hold off until you agree to what's expected of you."

"But Mr. Pardway—"

Thane laughed and slapped his thigh. "Well, well! Glen, I can see by your face you don't know what I'm talkin' about!" His laughter crashed out again. "Well, you ain't tumbled to why Agnes won't marry you, have you?"

"No, sir," Glen replied anxiously. "What is it?"

"You see," Thane began, "a young, innocent girl like that. Why, there's some things she couldn't say to you. And I, knowing my ward better'n you do"—he could not help thinking of "knowing" in the biblical sense—"I knowin' my ward better than you do, sorta wormed it out of her.

"You know, Agnes is a Catholic. You and I, why we look at things in a different light. But Catholics? Why, they can't marry until it's down in black and white that the children'll be raised Roman."

He smiled sympathetically. "I can imagine how you feel about that, Glen. But that's the way we men have to be. You gotta make sacrifices for women if you love 'em."

Glen was altogether taken by surprise. "Why, I didn't know that," he said earnestly. "I'd never thought about it."

"'At's just it, my boy. Young fellahs nowadays, they want to take on responsibilities. But they don't consider 'em seriously."

"I consider them seriously," Swazie protested, "but it never occurred to me that—"

"That's just it," Thane interposed, wagging his finger and waxing solemn. "It never occurred to you. Now let me ask you something, my son. Why didn't it occur to you?"

Swazie was floundering in forty fathoms of misery.

"Now what you want to do, Glen, is start taking life serious-like. And a coupla things better occur to you."

He rested back in his chair. "I don't want to seem to be readin' you a lecture, m'boy. I'm a business man.

And you're a business man." That was also a good one, he told himself. "And I'm here representing my ward on this business of the children being brought up Catholic. And I want a yes or no."

Well, Swazie replied timorously, this was entirely unexpected. He didn't know what to say. He would have to think—

"Nothin' of the kind," his tormentor interposed. "No thinkin' needed. Just wait. I'll show you somethin'." He sent for his secretary. "Wilkins, go get me that paper Father O'Hare left with me."

In a few minutes Glen was immersed in Pardway's whereases. After he had finished reading, he looked up lamely. "I don't know what to say!" he exclaimed sadly. "I just don't know what to say!"

"'Tain't so bad," Thane drawled. "First place, you mightn't have children. So all this fuss'd be for nothing. Then if you did have 'em, this way they'd sure be saved."

There was some little talk, more or less foreign to the subject. Then Thane saw that the young man was wavering. "Aw, come on," he coaxed. "Be a sport! It's the only way she'll marry. And besides, if you been behavin' yourself, there's no reason for you worryin' about children." He winked, and concluded, "C'mon! Put your John Hancock on it."

Swazie yielded in a little while.

"Only did your duty like a man," Thane observed. "And I respect you for it." He shook hands warmly. "Wouldn't mention this to Agnes," he advised as Swazie was about to leave. "You know, Agnes might be embarrassed, or—

"You understand things like this. Why, you have to take 'em in the spirit in which they're meant."

And now that there might be some favorable action in that quarter, Thane decided, he'd see how things stood with Zena Albans. Hadn't set eyes on her since the corner

had crashed. Well, she was probably waiting for him to make the first move.

"Glad to see me?" he asked as he was ushered into her presence by a colored maid. Sure didn't cut down the style she was living in, this Lamson smash-up.

"Glad to see you?" she echoed. "I don't know. Why should I be?"

Well, that was unexpected. "Search me," he replied. "Old time's sake, maybe. Seems to me like you and I used to be on speakin' terms."

"Would you like tea?"

One of her highfalutin' moods, eh? Sure held herself high for a fancy woman. "Guess you must have forgotten me," he murmured, lounging back. "I don't drink tea."

"A Martini?"

"Dry."

He watched her fix it. Something was wrong, all right. This wasn't any way for her to act. And still, maybe it wasn't any more contrary than anything else she did. "Say," he said, sipping his drink, "tell me something. You still Lamson's girl?"

"I'm very fond of him."

Thane grunted. "Funny how people change, isn't it?"

"I shouldn't say there's been much change."

"Not wanting to bring up the past," he assured her, "but it seems to me like you and I were sort of friendly once. What's happened?"

And now she smiled, and her warm eyes swept over him, and she answered simply, "You beat Lamson. It's made him nicer."

At another time, perhaps, he might have been roused to some fighting fury. But now, heavy and gorged and sleepy, the epileptic ego lay frozen beneath the glacial deposits of an icy indifference. "Do you mind telling me," he mumbled, "why he's more precious now that I've kicked him in the slats?"

"It hasn't anything to do with you," she told him.

"First I betrayed you because I was under obligation to him. And then, because you took it so decently, and because he had been treating me so abominably—I gave him away to you. Now I like him because he's quite helpless."

A very unusual woman, he told himself. Funny, no matter what a person was—some kind of principles wouldn't shake off. "What are you going to do," he wanted to know, "when Lamson's on his feet again and doesn't need you?"

"Hate him, probably."

"Hm. S'pose I'd been licked?"

"You're just as perverse as I am," she replied. "Sympathy is probably the last thing you'd want. Particularly if you'd been beaten."

He nodded.

"You!" she exclaimed, her warm eyes glowing with admiration. "The only time you need sympathy is when you're successful. Why, if things had gone against you, you'd have been so wrought up by it—that you'd have swept me off my feet."

"Do that anyway," he promised, "when I get good and ready." He yawned, and looked about for his hat. "Well, Zena, I'll be goin'! Seems like business is pretty slow around here."

"Do come again," she asked earnestly. "I love to talk to you. And if anything of the sort is possible to you—I'd like us to be very good friends."

"Always starts that way," he rumbled.

"Please, Tha'."

"Nope." He shook his head. "I was friends with a woman once. Sort of dull. You know, nothin' comes of it. My experience is that it's the wrong way to start." He smiled at her, a cumbersome, moody, kindly smile that implied some secret kinship between them. "Give my regards to Lamson," he said, and went on his way.

The next day he received a note enclosing the check he had once pressed upon her.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE VICTOR BELONGS TO THE SPOILS

THE months went by. And to Thane, nothing seemed to have happened. Swazie put in his placid, lovely appearance nearly every evening, now. And still Agnes was no nearer being married. Slowly and sedately and with infinite care she went on making memoranda of what occurred in the wheat world.

One day, as she proudly showed him a particularly excellent summary, he said, "All I do with 'em is tear 'em up. You know that, don't you?"

Pale, soft, serene—she was like a lovely ghost girl standing in the shadow of sorrows.

"Well," he grumbled, "why don'tcha answer me? You know I tear 'em up."

"They're yours," she sighed. "Why shouldn't you tear them up? You always do what you want—with what's yours."

Sure was giving him hell, all right. "Aw—" he returned moodily, "aw—is that so?"

He found that he could not face her, and so he left the room.

No use muddling over it, he told himself. Had to be handled in a practical way. Give her a new interest. And that was easy enough. This new house of his up on Rush Street, the house that used to be Albright's. Kick Albright out, that's what. And kick out some of Albright's truck. And get Agnes busy refurnishing the place. And planning for it. That'd keep her busy for a while.

He broached the matter to her.

"Thane!" she exclaimed joyously, "I'd love to do it."

"All right," he decreed. "And when that's done, you get married, see?"

"I see," she murmured.

For nearly six months she flew about getting things for the new house.

Darn slow about it, was Thane's unspoken comment. Trying to draw it out.

"Why?" he muttered aloud. "Why?"

He was not really asking himself the reason. That he knew only too well. He was asking himself the why of many things.

Why was his life so chaotic, so purposeless, so dull, so rhymeless, so reasonless?

Why was he moving into Orville Albright's house? Why had he wanted it? The fact was, he told himself, that he did not want it. Really, he had never wanted it. And who was Orville Albright? It seemed as if he hardly knew. What had he against him? Not a thing! Then why—

Well, it was like everything else in his life. He never got close to people. Even when he steamed up some conviction about hating them. Or when he cared for them. Cared for—

Agnes!

Agnes, Agnes! Some soaring, crying crow who preyed on a dead passion went winging through his consciousness. Agnes, Agnes—

No. For her own sake—she had to marry Swazie. Her own sake! What the hell did he care about her own sake?

"Thane," she was saying, "Thane, you're staring so. As you did—long, so long ago."

"Ain't starin'," he snapped. "Just got somethin' in my eye."

She sat down near him, and crumpled back dejectedly.

"What's the matter, Aggy?"

She sighed, and whispered, "It's done, Tha'. It's all done. The new house—" And her eyes seemed to be dwelling in wasteland of the years to come.

"'Bout time," he grumbled. "Think the place was a museum, the way you've been fussin' with it."

She looked up at him. Her soft brown eyes seemed to be pouring themselves out upon him. "Be kind," she pleaded, "please be kind."

Kind, he was saying to himself, kind. Well, why not? He had never been kind. It might be an interesting experiment.

Should he marry her, he wondered, should he?

For a moment the notion held him spellbound. Hm, why not? Indeed, why not?

Well, he'd see. Meanwhile, the thing to do was to conduct business as usual.

"Now the house is done, Agnes, you better see to gettin' married. No use our goin' on with this. No use our movin' into the big house together. You pick yourself out a trousseau, and—"

It was one of the few times in their association that she became pettish. "I won't!" she cried, pouting. "I simply won't. And you can't make me, Tha'. I won't be married here. I want to move to Rush Street. You can't deny me that, Tha'. After I've made the new house so beautiful! You can't deny me that!"

"All right," he agreed. "Just calm down. You get married soon's we've moved in."

But to Swazie, he asked himself, to Swazie?

God! Why were men cursed with hearts? The girl looked so sweet, and so simple, and sad, and so—

"Hell," he mumbled to himself, "I might do it yet."

They moved into the new house. In the process, Agnes discarded the many unopened boxes of flowers that stood piled in her closet.

It was quite a magnificent affair, this new house. So

much so that its resplendent halls held Thane in awe for weeks. Then, after he had become familiar with the illusion of grandeur, he said to Agnes, "Well, here we are. What about your gettin' married? How'll next week do?"

"Impossible!" was her dictum. "Why, my engagement hasn't been announced as yet."

"Listen!" he responded grimly, his shiny black eyes rolling over her. "You're goin' get announced, get me?"

"Get you," she echoed shamelessly, "get you?"

"Yah!" he snarled, taking no notice of her prayerful insinuation. "Get me!"

He had his way. The engagement was publicly announced. There was a party, a sumptuous, rollicking, wine-drenched party, at which every one but the bride-to-be was inordinately gay—gay perhaps, because hardly any of the guests much knew or cared about Agnes Weatherly and her young man.

The whole house was thrown open. Henry Cullom commanded a squad of liveried attendants. There was music. There was dancing. The most delicate viands and the rarest wines were served. And there was, according to the master of the house, "Sassiety what was sassiety!"

'Big Tha' was spreading himself, and those that loved and admired him, in their none too intimate way, were there. The sharp-faced, pink-cheeked Daniel was there. Mrs. Ogden Downers and her dowagers-in-waiting came—by dint of persuasion perhaps, but they came. The most important of the Pitmen were attendance. The gallant, bewhiskered Judge Brechtanhauer and the bulkily impressive Senator Kirkland lent the glamor of their legislative estate. Every paper in town sent its society editor.

In the midst of this strangely welded social scheme, somehow made to mix by the heavy-handed alchemy of Thane Pardway, stood the pleasant, uncritical, totally feazed Glen Swazie.

He was indeed a picture. His straight, sandy hair,

parted in the center, was plastered down the sides of his narrow head. His flat, uneager eyes were shot through with a bewitched wonderment. His little flaxy mustache, working hither and yon on a trembling lip, made little darting shadows on his scrubbed, shiny cheeks. He was saying thousands of right things, and shaking hundreds of important hands, and all the while not quite believing that this dream of dollar majesty could be true.

Thane, noting that Swazie had been momentarily forgotten, swaggered up to him. "Well, Glen?"

The young man smiled. "Well, Mr. Pardway?"

"Come along." Thane put his arm about Swazie and drew him off to the new library. After seeing that no one was about, he said, "Now Glen, I expect you'll be married pretty soon."

"Yes, I hope so, Mr. Pardway."

"Now then," Thane went on, "there's no use to your pluggin' away at Lamson & Biggers the rest of your life. How about settin' yourself up in business?"

"Well, I've been thinking about that. But—"

"Money no object!" Thane called sharply. "I want my ward to be well taken care of. Now you look around. And when you see somethin' promisin—lemme know. You'll have a check for the amount soon's you're ready to buy."

Glen's face clouded. "Mr. Pardway," he pronounced hurtfully, "I can't do it. I can't."

"Why not?"

Swazie worked himself deeper and deeper into the tangles of evasion.

"'Nough of that, Glen! Now come on, spill it! Why won't you lemme help you?"

And Swazie, seeing no escape but the truth, blurted out something that had been burning his tongue for these last weeks. "Agnes," he said, "has told me what's, what's—you know. You and her. I couldn't take your money."

Pardway looked up at the soft, warm dust of his beloved

Millet. What a fool she was, he told himself. Why couldn't she have left well enough alone? Not for his sake. It didn't matter to him what Swazie knew. But for hers, poor thing. Swazie'd probably be throwing it up to her for the rest of her life.

"That's why," Glen went on miserably, "that's why she wouldn't marry me. It wasn't because the children were to be raised as Catholics. Though I can see how you thought so. O, no! She couldn't bring herself to marry me until she had told me about—about that."

Pardway, still staring up at the picture, thought he heard a sob splash about in the silence.

"It was awfully hard for her to bring herself to tell me," Swazie said after a while. "Awfully hard."

"Yah—well," Thane answered gruffly, "guess it was!" And as if he were the injured one, he turned his back.

"I'm sorry," Glen stammered, and left the room.

Something was happening in the soul of the heavy-handed farceur. A swishing pride, anger and remorse gushed into his consciousness. For a moment an uncontrollable shuddering possessed him. "Somebody walked over m'grave," he mumbled. And from way down in the animal underworld of his being came a breath of fury. The monstrous epileptic ego had given vent to a slumbrous snort.

Thane, returning to his guests, sought out Father Dion and hauled him off.

"Father Dion," he mouthed rapidly, excitedly, with mock humility, "dear good Father Dion. Can you imagine what I've done for you? Can you 'magine?"

How overwrought the man seems, Dion says to himself. And he pretends to good deeds! "No, I can't imagine."

"Father Dion, dear noble Father Dion!" snorted the clown of the ego. "I've done something that even you, no doubt, couldn't have done." He snatched at a bottle and tossed off a drink, hoping to plead intoxication should he make a fool of himself. "Ah! straight rum, eh? That's

the stuff!" His palm swung against the priest's shoulder. "I—" For a moment he seemed to forget what he wanted to say. And then, melodramatically, he put a finger to his forehead and his shiny black eyes rolled around. "I—ah, yes!" And he rushed to a console.

"Here it is, Father Dion, here it is!" And he waved the paper Glen had long since cajoled into signing. "Read it, Father Dion, read it!"

And while the priest studied the lengthy document, Pardway strutted around the room, to the beat of the distant strains of a waltz.

After a few minutes, he had heard the paper rattle down to the table, and turned to Dion O'Hare.

For just a moment these two men beheld each other. And then, with a glance of infinite pity and scorn, the priest quickly left the room.

Father Dion's glance haunted him for days.

Who the hell was this fellah, he demanded of himself, to look down on the Great Bear?

The Great Bear? The Great Bear—it seemed to matter so little now. Hell! Here he had smashed the Kershaw Corner, taken over Orville Albright's mansion, gotten Agnes to announce her engagement, made Glen sign that paper— Victories, all. But somehow, those victories didn't belong to him. Ah, well. It was an old story—

The victor belonged to the spoils.

The spoils—they held him in tow. Now there occurred to him two dozen maneuvers he should have executed during the Kershaw Corner. And this damned house, he fumed, it had cost him, new fixings and all, a third of what he had won. And Glen! Sure hadn't gotten very far by making a fool of the boy.

And Agnes. Agnes— Already he felt her slipping through his fingers.

And that confessor of hers! Looked down on 'Big

Tha' as if he were dirt. And those haunting, priestly eyes kept on staring at him—

The furies were once again in attendance upon Thane Pardway. He did not know what to do with himself. At every turn Dion O'Hare's eyes stuck out at him.

Then it dawned upon him that the priest was only human. Not a bad-looking fellow, he told himself. A pretty put-up man, if ever there was one. No doubt there was something strange in his life. Huh! Looked down on 'Big Tha' did he? Well, that hadn't gotten others very far.

Into the vacuum of his days came a vengeful notion. He'd track this noble soul and see for himself.

Hm. Why not?

Through the following weeks Thane shadowed Dion O'Hare through the parish rounds. This spying became a passion to him. He sweltered under the Chicago sun, not knowing or caring that it was hot. He stood drenched in the driving rains, intent only upon the obscure door that the priest had entered.

An obdurate, angry conviction grew upon him as the days went by without offering a grain of evidence. What the hell was it, he wondered. Was this man really a saint? Didn't he ever sink into the stews? Bah! It couldn't be! Surely there must be a woman somewhere—

Or had the duffer found him out, and decided to lead him a wild goose chase?

One evening, as he was playing hide-and-go-seek with the priest's shadow, Father Dion halted under a lamp-post, and suddenly swung around. Before he knew it, Pardway was staring into those pitying eyes.

"Isn't it a silly performance?" Dion was saying.

Thane simulated the aspect of vast surprise. "Why if it ain't Father Dion!" he exclaimed, extending his large hand. "How's the—?" He was going to say "boy." "Why, how are yah?"

"Rather weary of being followed."

Thane smiled and decided to make a clean breast of it. "Say," he said, "I'm tired o' follerin' you."

"Why do you do it?"

A false, fawning smirk flowered into being where a frown had lain. "Don' know," he mumbled meekly. "Must be crazy, I guess." And in support of his ponderous pose he seasoned it with a few grains of truth. "You see, Father, I can't believe you ain't like the rest of us. I sorta—I sorta had to find out."

"Do you know what's wrong with you, Pardway?"

"Crazy, I guess."

"Not at all," the priest replied tersely. "You're merely in love. And you haven't the good sense to know it."

Somehow, after that Thane could not go on with his prying.

CHAPTER XL

TWO DOLLAR WHEAT

IN May, 1888, as Thane Pardway mounted the broad granite stoop of his Rush Street mansion, he heard Agnes singing.

Agnes, he said to himself—singing! Holy smoke, had she regained her voice? Would all that fuss about a career start anew? Wouldn't she ever marry Swazie? The wedding had been put off twice—and now she was singing!

He had hardly entered the house but what she greeted him happily, a triumphant radiance shining from her face. "Thane," she cried, "there's going to be a corner!"

"What makes you think so?"

"The May Government report came out this morning, Tha'. It predicts a wide scarcity."

"Call my office right away," he ordered. "See what's goin' on there."

In a few minutes she reported that wheat had closed with a four point gain.

So, she'd been singing about this prospective corner. She thought that he'd go into the market, that he'd need her, that he'd no longer press her to marry.

"What information do you want, Tha'? I'll have it for you as quickly as possible."

"Wanna know when you're getting married?"

"September," she answered hastily. "Now do you want summaries—"

"All I want is a little quiet!" he growled. "I'll have to think about this. If I want anything else, I'll let you know."

The Great Bear was in a troubled, uncertain state. No use being the Great Bear, he told himself, unless he could do something about this. What was more, it seemed that people were looking to him to do something about it. And yet, what could he do? He had paid so little attention to the market in recent months that the latest developments took him unawares. And from what he could see, the market already had its master, Hutchinson.

Nevertheless, Agnes was set to work again.

But her findings were uninspiring. Hutchinson, Ream and Cudahy were bossing the bear side. Toward the last of May, Hutchinson seemed to have covered his cash holdings, and gone long. There were rumors of a corner in July.

By July 10th there was no reason for doubt. It was openly conceded that 'Old Hutch' was running the corner. And still the Great Bear dallied.

Why, The Pit wanted to know, why? Didn't Pardway really dislike Hutchinson? Had their spats during the Kershaw Corner been conceived in deceit? Were these two playing hand in hand? And if they weren't, where was the Great Bear's vaunted leadership?

On the evening of the 11th, a delegation representing the losing bears waited upon Thane Pardway. Besides asking him to take over the reins, they had an important piece of news for him. Word had just come that B. P. Hutchinson had been severely injured. The old man, in looking over some of his grain stored in a tank elevator, had slipped down an iron staircase, and tumbled six stories to the ground. Rumor had it that his spine had been broken, that he would be laid up indefinitely.

"So you see," Alton Beecher was saying, "you can step right in and do what you please. He's in a hospital. He won't be able to get to The Pit for months. Why, man, it's the chance of a lifetime!"

The rest of the bear committee voiced similar sentiments.

"Hutch has been telling everybody he's got for us a

rod in a pickle," Lassmann added. "I'll bet, Tha', he's been gunning for you right along."

The Great Bear nodded. "I'm not ready to go in yet, boys," he said. "When I am, I'll let you know. Besides, none of you fellahs thought I was so wonderful during the Harper deal."

And in a little while the delegation adjourned to Beecher's club, whence it was decided that the Great Bear had turned bull.

Left to himself, Thane was wondering why he had refused the honors. For one thing, he told himself, he didn't go fighting a man when he was down. And for another, Hutchinson was twice as dangerous down—as up. The wounded tiger—

And still, he asked himself, what was the real reason for his apathy?

In some dim, instinctive manner he knew. He had had his fill.

But even so—was he to stand by while others drew the sword? Yes, it seemed that way. Thank Heaven he had saved his prestige by putting the others on their mettle. The only thing that could save his face now was Hutchinson's triumph. And with a canny, animal instinctiveness he felt that Hutchinson was about to ride the crest of the wave. Ah, every dog had his day!

Uncertain of himself as he was, Pardway nevertheless kept Agnes to the grindstone. He directed her research in minute detail. At times this was agony for him. For once again, all the sweet and intimate perfume of this pale flower of his passion pervaded his senses. And he was infinitely more aware of his longing to possess her than he had been through the course of the Kershaw Corner. Yet despite his fear of some emotional outburst on his part, he could not relinquish his conferences with her. Some insistent curiosity was burning away at him. He had to know what was going on in the wheat, he told himself, he had to know! He was like an old commander far from

the scene of battle, yet intent upon every maneuver, hanging over the maps and dispatches, fighting and refighting for every foot of distant ground. And like some glorious old gladiator, the spirit of this pensioner of The Pit hovered over the arena. Men wondered what he would have said, what he would have done, how he would have stormed the bull redoubts.

Six weeks after Hutchinson's accident, the old man once more made his appearance in The Pit. The very sight of him was enough to send wheat up two cents. And yet, the talk was more of Pardway than of the present Pit master. Pardway! How would he have handled this new rise?

By now the notion that he was Hutchinson's silent partner had worn thin. And surely, The Pitmen decided, had he been active, they would have known it. But the Great Bear had not been seen in La Salle Street for months, and his traders seemed to be handling no extraordinary assignments. How about going to 'Big Tha' and once more asking him to take command?

"No," he replied when waited on a second time. "I've no stomach for it."

But just a few days back, he reflected, Hutchinson had gone long another five million bushels. And there were reports of no receipts of wheat at Duluth. And every day now, Hutchinson bought and bought. And foreign markets were higher because of poor crop conditions in Europe.

On August 25th wheat advanced another two cents. On the last day of the month it was conceded in some quarters that Hutchinson owned about all the cash wheat in sight. On September 1st he received and paid for seven hundred thousand additional bushels. And on September 3rd, the May option sold at a dollar. On the following day Hutchinson bought a million bushels for December delivery from Leopold Bloom, and smilingly put down two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in margins.

Was the old boy riding for a fall, Thane asked himself.

And how long could he, the Great Bear, tolerate this inactivity?

Again a delegation waited upon him.

"No," he shouted savagely, "no!"

Now even Agnes was after him. "Tha'," she said, "you're surely going in, aren't you?"

"Don't know," he rumbled, "don't know." He swagged up and down the room. The brutish lurch of his shoulders came back to him. The eager trembling of his large hands beset him again. A menacing scowl once more overshadowed his haunted face.

How long, he was demanding of the epileptic ego, how long would he have to wait before seizing the sword?

"I know you're going in," Agnes declared happily.

"Ain't asked you!" he barked at her. "You're to keep your mind on the weddin'. It's only a week now."

"I've put it off again, Tha'. I told Glen last night."

He said nothing. Might all be for the best, he thought. No telling what might happen. At any moment, now, he might jump into the market. And if he did, he'd need her.

Agnes, encouraged by his silence, drew swiftly up to him. Her pallid, glistening face shone into him. "O, Tha'," she cried, "why don't you go in? Go in and lick Hutchinson, Tha', and then marry me."

"Small order," he mumbled, staring down at the magenta tiles of his new swimming pool.

"But you can do it, Tha'," she sobbed. "You can do it."

"Hm."

She furtively touched his hand.

"None of your nonsense," he snapped, stepping away from her. "Soon's this market is settled, you'll be married."

"You'll marry me, won't you, Thane?"

Christ! His head was full of her ghostly perfume. All her sweetness was circling about through his senses. If she didn't shut up—something was likely to happen.

He strode into the music room.

She followed him like a shadow, saying, "You love me, Tha'. You love me, dear."

"Aw—no such thing."

"You do," she sobbed. "Or else you wouldn't avoid me, you wouldn't walk away from me."

Answer that one, was his silent comment, answer that one!

"Father Dion and I were talking about you," she went on. "He told me you were in love with me. He told you so. And after that you stopped following him. That proves something."

"Something," he echoed. "But not what you think."

"You do love me!" she cried. "You do!"

"How do you know?"

"I know! I know!"

And overcome by her sobbing, Agnes went back to her work. But that evening she was at him again. "There isn't a single good reason for your not marrying me," she insisted.

"That's reason enough for me!" he sang out, and left the house.

. . .

She did not see him for a week.

Then he turned up, bleary eyed, heavy jowled, and blasted looking.

"You've been drinking," she said.

"Yes, I've been drinking."

"You're deliberately keeping out of the market," she shot at him, "just to show me I'm not necessary to you."

"Maybe."

She went up to him and shook him. "Tha'," she cried, "Tha'! Why don't you come to your senses?"

"Got no senses," he simpered, smiling to himself and leering at her.

That evening, when he had sobered a little, she ventured, "Do you still want me to go on charting the wheat?"

He nodded.

"Does that mean you may go in?"

Again he nodded.

"Tha'," she said, "you hardly talk to me any more. And you won't look at me. You feel you've wronged me, don't you?"

"Um hum."

"Then why do you want me to marry Glen?"

"Tha's why," he mumbled, "I got to get you out of my life."

She kept the silence.

Then, for the first time in their association, he was pleading with her. "For Christ's sake, Aggy," he implored, "don't make it harder."

After a while he asked, "Now what's September wheat?"

"It touched a dollar to-day."

He whistled, remembering that it was the first time in five years September had touched this figure. Hell, he fumed. Perhaps he'd been a fool to get so drunk. What was the matter with him, anyway? The idea of 'Big Tha' getting all tanked up in order to keep himself out of the market. He'd have to take it like a man. Either decide to stay out, once and for all—or go in.

"I'm going in," he declared angrily.

But luckily for him, he had a change of heart the following day. He realized that Hutchinson's position could not be effectively challenged.

On September 27th wheat was weak at opening. By the end of the day, however, the old athlete had hurled it up for a gain of twenty-one points.

Thane, lounging about The Pit, came across the old master sitting forlornly on the gallery stairs.

"Hutch," he said, "I got to hand it to you. You're a wonder. And I pride myself on having the good sense to keep out."

The old man smiled his shabby smile. His uncertain eyes beamed with a tawdry sympathy. "Better tell your

short friends," he tweedled casually, "that to-morrow she'll go to a dollar-and-a-half. I'm calling my shots now."

Hutchinson was as good as his word. On Friday, September 28th, wheat reigned at 150. And the newspapers through the country said, "IT'S HUTCH'S MARKET."

"So it is," the old athlete mused, "and you boys better settle before I jack it up another fifty points."

The shorts became abusive. The shorts threatened not to settle. The shorts broadcast the information that "the big squeeze" had drawn a check from the clearing house for nearly seven hundred thousand dollars—a check covering Thursday's profits. And the shorts sang:

"I see Old Hutch start for the club,
Good-by, my lover, good-by.
He's given us a pretty rough rub,
Good-by, my lover, good-by."

But for all the rancor, dour admiration and abuse that was hurled at him, 'Old Hutch' merely smiled a simple smile. And sat on the gallery stairs, twiddling his scrubby mustache. And rambled on about religion, philosophy, and the Bard of Avon. And when some unfortunate bear went by, he mumbled, "Better settle now. She'll hit two dollars to-morrow."

For the fourth time the shorts implored Thane Pardway's advice.

"Search me," he said, "I'm only a spectator. I don't know what to do."

No one believed him. Well, the bears decided, they were in for it.

If only they had 'Big Tha'! But 'Big Tha' or no 'Big Tha'—Hutchinson, they resolved, wouldn't make good his two dollar prediction.

But he did, and with Thane Pardway's benediction. Before Saturday's opening the Great Bear went up to the old man and said, "Hutch, don't let 'em scare you. Men

like you and me—we're made out of different clay. And that's why I'm for you." And as the bell rang, he shook that lean, uncaring hand.

The trading had hardly gotten under way but what Billy Linn offered cash wheat at 115.

Hutchinson, making a 'round turn' in futures, forced his corner price. And pandemonium broke loose in The Pit.

"Two dollar wheat!"

"Two dollar wheat!"

A minute later Henry Parker, standing not ten feet from the Pit master, offered cash wheat at 110.

And in the midst of a confusion greater than that of the Kershaw Corner, the indicator arm wavered, and then sharply shot up to 200.

At closing, B. P. Hutchinson was the undisputed master of the market. In the last four days he had made five million dollars. He had regained his lost prestige. He had swept into discard every legendary figure of The Pit, except—the Great Bear.

The Great Bear, people insisted, if he had cared to do so, could have smashed Hutchinson's Corner. Somehow, because of his forbearance, his snow-balling shadow spread ever larger upon the Pitman's mind.

But as for the man himself, though he still wallowed in the slushy battle ground of the Kershaw Corner, he was ravaged by a gnawing envy. Two dollar wheat! Two dollar wheat—and he had played dead.

Well, he could thank his lucky stars. Had he gone in, and been beaten, there would have been no means of escape from Agnes.

She would never have left him had he been down.

CHAPTER XLI

LOVE'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

CAUGHT as he was in the toils of two conflicting passions—his passion for ruling over the lives of others, and his fierce possessiveness—Thane Pardway was at a loss about Agnes.

And then one day, feeling that he could not back down, and that she might be even more entrancing when the law put her beyond his pale—he said, “Agnes, I want you to be married as soon as possible.”

His directness, coupled with his evident misery, made her submissive. “Very well,” she agreed. “Sometime next month. Meanwhile, let me stay until the frescos are put in.”

The frescos! Ever since they had occupied the Rush Street house Agnes had been enhancing its splendour, barbaric beauty by introducing this note or that. And now the last touches of artifice were to be cemented to the walls. A group of frescos from a Venetian palace had just arrived. They were to adorn a sort of chapel that had been transformed into a picture gallery.

“All right,” he sighed with cumbersome resignation, “till the frescos are in.” And then, he reflected, once she had materialized this dream of his magnificence—out she’d go.

Pretty tough, he told himself, pretty tough!

What was going on in the mind of this man?

He firmly believed that Agnes could never forget him, that some part of him would live on in her, that she would eternally be enthralled by the thought of him. For had

she not been poisoned, infected, infused with the strange rapture he could evoke in women? Ah—she would much rather suffer in this barren shame than be transplanted to the nourishing soil of Swazie's devotion.

But even so, as surely and as deeply as he believed these things—he could not rest. A sobbing, tearing remorse was eating away at him. He hated to lose her. And yet he was helpless in the throes of the conflicting passions.

There were moments in which he rationalized. It was all for her good. She was a domestic sort. She deserved no better. She had not been strong enough, bold enough, to accept him unquestioningly on the loverly basis that he would have gladly prolonged. Nor had she been strong enough to make him buckle under to the marital relationship she wanted. She was even too weak, he told himself, to manage the Swazie business. He had to do that for her, he had to save her from the pitiful drifting in the semi-moral morass of being neither mistress nor wife!

True and pertinent as these factors were, there was more to be said. After all, he silently confessed, she was the only woman he had ever known who had some electric concept of soul. She was the only woman he had ever known who called forth all the lowest and highest in him. She was the only woman he had ever known who had melted him, at times, into one splashing gust of flame. Good Christ! She was the only woman—

And what a mess he had made out of it, what a mess.

She who had meant so much to him, poor thing, had gotten so little out of it all. His might merely made her tremble. His majesty merely made her his slave. And as for his goodfellowship—well, that didn't go either. Too coarse for her. Most of the time when he thought he was going out of his way to be nice to her—she was only putting up with it because she loved him. Truly, the only thing he had given her was pain. And she had loved him so much, she was willing to take even that.

And then material things. He had never been rid of

the terrible feeling that he was her debtor. Somehow, in her unwillingness, her inability to accept material things—his sense of freedom, of lavishness, of the pride of paying for what one possesses, his very soul was in pawn to her. And as far as he could see, there was no way of redeeming the pledge.

Terrible to think of it. For all that he had infinitely more power than she, for all that he had taken her, and despoiled her, and then thrown her over—for all that he was weaker than she. She was resigned to him. But he was not resigned to himself.

If only he had the understanding and the power to make some settlement with her, a settlement that would free his spirit, his spirit that had been enslaved by the fetters of her non-resistance! If only she had fought against him, then he could have fought back, and somehow won. But as far as he could see, he had only struck her blow after blow, and she had just come back for more. And forgave him, damn her!

His whole huge frame shook with an appalling laughter. What a terrible thing it was, he told himself, to think that the more he injured her, the greater her forgiveness—and the greater her forgiveness, the more he resented it.

And that was why, damn it all, he couldn't marry her. He couldn't endure her forgiveness. And he couldn't endure her gratitude.

"What are you thinking about, Tha?"

She had just come into his study, and wearily sank down into a chair. All day long she had been puttering around with the few sticks that would furnish her future home.

"Been thinking," he answered, "about what we talked over the other day. Now that piano I gave you, and all, I want you to take those things."

She took her hat off and smoothed her disheveled hair. "No, Tha'."

"Aw, go on! You don't want to refuse because those things're expensive."

"That's not why, Tha'."

"Well—why?"

Their glances began to shuttle back and forth, spinning a snare of pity, anger and remorse—a snare in which their hearts had so often been caught.

"Now looka here, Aggy, don't be a fool about this. I gave you those things because I wanted you to have 'em. And you're insulting me by not taking 'em."

Her tired eyes held a glimmer of pained amusement.

"An' it's a darn shame," he ranted on, "you burdening Glen this way. He's not a very wealthy fellah. And he'll want some nice things in his house. And so will you. And it'd be a darn shame for him to have to go and pay out good money for pictures just because you're too pernickety to take what belongs to you."

"Glen doesn't care for pictures," she said.

"And then that piano. Don't you think maybe he'd like a little music when he comes home from a hard day's work?"

"It wouldn't be any use to me, Tha'. You know I don't sing any more."

"Well, play it!" he stormed. "And if you don't play it, it's a nice piece of furniture, isn't it? You don't expect a salaried man to buy a piano, do you?"

"How considerate of Glen you've become," she remarked quietly. "Besides, you've forgotten that I still have the money father left me."

"Well, you better keep it for a rainy day," he sputtered. "Now looka here, I don't want any more nonsense outa you. Those pictures and that piano and the ciborium and all—what am I goin' to do with 'em? They're yours. I don't want 'em around here after you've gone. Why, it wouldn't be right after I gave them to you. I never was an Injun-giver. Aggy, I'm asking you like this was my last will and testament—please take 'em!"

"Thane," she murmured, "if you'll tell me truthfully why you want me to, I'll do it. It's because—it's because

they'll remind you of me, isn't it? You'll feel better if they're not around, won't you? As if all were settled between us. That's right, isn't it?"

"Even so," he said, "even so."

The next day, everything he had given her, with the exception of the unscratched carriage, was carted out to the little home Glen and Agnes were to occupy.

On the evening before the wedding Thane was moodily looking up at his Millet. Soft, he told himself, soft. And warm. And the stirring bosom of earth, wrapped with the warm dust of earth's children— Ah, Agnes! The sweet flesh of Agnes, and the soft soul of Agnes—things like that were in this picture.

She entered the room.

Funny, he thought, he was trying to keep out of her way these days. And she seemed to be tagging after him. "Going to be married to-morrow," he said. "Wonder Glen ain't here to-night."

"I thought," she whispered, "that you might like this evening alone—with me."

He smiled, a heavy, dolorous, drooling smile.

"Glen," she explained, "is giving a little party for the ushers."

She'd probably put him up to it!

"Haven't you anything to say to me, Tha'?"

"Yah," he began, "I have. Know what I did this afternoon, Aggy? I was readin' that letter your dad wrote me. You know, the one you brought to my office. And I got somethin' to say to you about that.

"In that letter he said I was to regard you as a—as a sacred trust. Hm!" He solemnly stared down at his boots. "I don't want you to hold anything against the memory of your father, Aggy. He made a mistake, I s'pose, in trustin' you to me. And still—

"He never knew me to betray a trust, Aggy. I never broke my word with any man. That is, with any man

that was on the square with me. I been crafty and schemey and this an' that—but my word was my bond."

He waited for her to say something. But she only leaned back, closed her eyes, and sighed.

"Funny," he rambled on, "the only person I ever cared much about—I was rottenest to. Sort o' held it against you, Aggy, that you could make me care."

"But you cared so little," she crooned softly. "And you hurt me so much—"

"Couldn't help it, Aggy. Had to be rotten to you. Some darn devil got ahold of me, and—" He nodded his heavy head in ponderous resignation to the furies that sometimes possessed him. "Seem's you weren't made for a man like me," he rumbled grewsomely. "Still, you don't hold it against me, do you?"

"No," she whispered, "no. I don't hold it—" And her voice broke, and she could only echo, "No—no."

Even now his instinctive love of masquerade made inroads upon his mood. "You bein' younger'n I am," he said, assuming the characterization of a jilted lover. "And bein' in love with another man, and all." And he smiled philosophically . . . forgivingly.

"I'm not in love with Glen!" she flared resentfully. How like him, she thought, to first gain her sympathy by his sincerity. And then, when he held her enthralled, to clownishly wiggle into another guise. And then to top off his play-acting by putting her in a false position! "I'm not in love with him!" she cried.

"Yes, yes," he dawdled. "I un'erstand. But you know how it is. Man nearly your own age. And you'll—learn to love him."

"Thane!" she implored, "you know why I'm marrying him. It's because you want me to!"

"Yes, yes," he mumbled heedlessly. "There's that, too. Doubtless I'll feel better when it's all over and done. But that's because I know what's best for you. Man nearer your own age—"

"That's twice you've said it!"

Better go a little slow. She was acting up excited-like. "And what's more," he simpered, "pretty soon you'll be sure in your mind about him. Course, if you're crazy 'bout him—that's that." A lush smile crawled up his large, swarthy face. His shiny black eyes rolled over her.

"But if he don't turn out so promisin'—why you and I—Hm. Why, we could still be pals, couldn't we?"

She seemed to turn to ice. After a long pause, she said, "A terrible thing has happened, Tha'. I feel that I no longer care."

Made a bad break! Could she really have changed? Of course, she had good cause. It was bad enough to pretend that he had no need of her. But to hint that once she was married—

But even so. That she no longer cared! Could it be true? He had to know! All of a sudden the silence was shouting against him! He must know! He *had* to know!

Impulsively, he snatched her hand.

She let him hold it.

He pressed his lips upon her.

She did not stir.

"Aggy!" he implored. "Aggy!"

She murmured vaguely, distantly, "Yes . . . Thane?"

Good Christ! Did she mean it? Had she gone dead on him? Why didn't she snatch her hand away? Why didn't she protest? Why didn't she move? Why didn't she say something human? Good Christ, why was she so cold?

He withdrew his hand. He removed his quivering lips. A terrible thought struck him between the eyes. It wasn't true, went screaming through his consciousness, it wasn't true! It couldn't be true!

A harsh, passion-racked plea came ripping out of him. "Aggy," he panted hoarsely, "Aggy, I didn't mean it! I didn't mean what I said, Aggy. After you're married I won't— Of course not! I—I was only joking. I didn't mean it!"

He fancied that it must be the laughter of the gods that hammered away at his ears. Or was it a sudden cloudburst? Or the muffled tolling of brazen bells? Or—

Why couldn't he hear what she was saying? Well, it didn't matter. Didn't matter, as long as she understood. He'd say it again. "I didn't mean it, Aggy. I really didn't mean it—"

And so faintly . . . ever so faintly . . . like a sad echo through a storm, came her soft sobbing, "Glen— How good he's been. How patient. How true." Silence. The reverberant echo. Then the sob through the storm. "It seems . . . I've never thought of Glen . . . till now. . . ."

All through the night, and the morning of the wedding, Thane Pardway was like a man in a daze.

It couldn't be true, he told himself a thousand times, it couldn't be true!

What? What couldn't be true? He had gone over it so much that he lost track— What was he talking about? Oh, yes—

No, no! It couldn't be true!

She loved him!

She'd always love him!

It didn't really matter what he did. Or what he had done. He couldn't lose her!

His Aggy!

His Aggy— What was she doing all dressed up in white? And her soft brown eyes misty behind the veil. And ushers that he didn't know. And bridesmaids—

Yes, the wedding.

Well, he'd show 'em. Pretty soon Father Dion would ask if any one objected. And he'd speak now—or forever hold his peace.

What was that?

Why couldn't he hear?

O—he must have missed that part of it. It seemed as

though they were already married. Father Dion had slipped the ring on her finger.

Her finger! One night she had let it rest beside his ear. And—O God!

Well, now she was Glen's wife.

Didn't matter. As soon as they got back to the house, and the wedding breakfast was over—he'd jump in a cab with her, that's what. And they'd drive off. And they'd—

"Buck up!" Daniel shot under his breath. "Buck up, you fool! Do you want to give the show away?"

"No . . . no," he heard himself reply, "no."

He was coming to, it seemed. And now that Agnes was upstairs, changing, he'd be on his guard. At the last minute he'd escort her to the cab, and—

Henry Cullom was handing out little containers of wheat kernels. Why?

O, yes, they'd throw wheat instead of rice.

Here she came, all ready for traveling. Now one, two—

But before he knew it, the carriage had rolled away.

And those beside him were going back into the house.

And he—he stood there on the curb, looking down at his widespread hand—at his widespread hand through which the kernels of the wheat slowly trickled into the gutter.

THE END

